

# **Christ's three Days in Hell**

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**AN ASTOUNDING CHRISTIAN FALLACY**

**By**

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### REVELATION OF AN ASTOUNDING CHRISTIAN FALLACY

When in a moment of high dudgeon, exasperation or exhausted patience at someone's despicable conduct we cavalierly consign his immortal soul to Dante's Inferno, we should be told that our mode of redress is silly and ridiculous beyond measure, since both he and we are already in that dark and gloomy underworld of theology. There is no sense in urging a fellow mortal to go to a place when he is already there. The present writer could, with full legal equity, claim an international copyright on the idea, now to be proclaimed for the first time authoritatively, that in plain cold fact, devastating to the canons of theology, but nevertheless irrefutable, that no one can go from this earth to hell, or ever will go there. This declaration is not thrown out in either scurrility or buffoonery. It is meant to be asserted as literal truth, and, as will be shown, is demonstrated as true by the simplest and most inexpugnable logic. One can not go to a place where one already is. One has to be elsewhere to go to a given place. And this fact and this logic can now bring to this world release and relief from the most frightful of its theological nightmares over the centuries by shattering forever the baneful religious superstition that a human soul can go to hell. Because, as better scholarship now clarifies it, all the souls now inhabiting physical bodies on this earth are already in hell.

It can now be heralded to the four quarters of the world that this earth is the only hell ever contemplated in the minds of the sage writers of the ancient sacred Scriptures of the world, and therefore hell is not to be found or located anywhere else. For better or worse, for good or ill, we are all right now in hell; and it is only a matter of our education, our understanding, our culture or our self-discipline whether we are enjoying what can legitimately and not too irreverently be called a hell of a fine time or making a devil of a bad go at it. As God the Father never designed that his children should fall into a region where pain and misery are suffered gratuitously or out of relation to purposed beneficence, it has to be presumed that our sojourn in this hell has been contrived in cosmic counsels to bring us joy and eventual bliss. For all religions in their highest and sanest presentments consistently affirm that felicity is to crown earth life. Hell has been loaded with opprobrium and infamy only because we have been misled to believe it is some other place far worse than this world. It is now possible, with all good grace, for us to extend to all our fellow inmates in this limbo of a false theology the wish and hope that they are enjoying some felicity without having to wait for transferal to the celestial Paradise. With metaphor shifted a bit to match another Biblical symbolism, we may heartily wish each other a "whale" of a good time in Hades, since in the Jonah and other "fish-stories" that one finds in ancient sacred lore, it was in the belly of the whale that Jonah (the divine element in man's nature) spent his three days and nights in hell. For he exclaims: "Out of the belly of Hades have I cried unto thee, O God." Holy Scripture does not inform us whether he enjoyed his unique voyage across the sea of life in this extraordinary mode of transportation, but at any rate it landed him safely and perhaps triumphantly on "that farther shore." On a naïve and somewhat superficial view it may be considered unfortunate that instead of a "whale" of a glamorous time in this belly of Hades, millions have had or are still having a "wail" of a deuced bad time. But, as

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all experience undergone by the souls of God's children in any sphere may legitimately be considered educative, being in the nature of strains and stresses calculated to lead all lives upward to enhanced happiness in a progressive evolution, the lament over our enforced session at the wailing wall of this life on earth can be happily mollified by amended philosophical considerations.

It seems now and forever incredible that the whole grandiose structure of the wondrous ancient arcane science of the soul, the unified physical and spiritual evolution of man to grades of higher consciousness, has been wrecked for any sane comprehension by a thing seemingly so minor and inconsequential as the misconception of the use of symbolic imagery and the play of poetic fancy in analogical depiction of truth. Yet, categorically and bluntly stated, such has been the case in the greatest miscarriage, defeat and debacle of human intelligence in the field of religious philosophy in all the ages. The place or region in which theological ineptitude located the two states of conscious being, happiness and misery, universally presumed the one or the other, to follow this life on earth, has been psychologically determinative of the mental health, or conversely, of the insanity and hypnotic hallucination of millions of earth's inhabitants over the ages.

This essay is conceived in the spirit and with the motive of awakening the slumbering mind of the Occidental world to the

sobering realization that its dominating Christian religion has almost from the moment of its inception nearly twenty centuries ago located its predicated heaven and hell in a time and in a world both completely amiss from their proper locale and proper period. It can now be proclaimed as an incontrovertible fact that this religion of the West, so presumptuously vaunting itself as superior to all others, has perpetrated the crassest asininity of all religious history in both mistiming and misplacing the hell, or dark underworld of its Scriptures and its theology in a totally different world from the one which the knowing authors of the world's sacred scripts intended to be understood. In fact its theologians and interpreters have ridiculously mislocated their hell! They have thrust it from that area of life to which it was meant to appertain in the esoteric formulations of ancient religious literature clear over into another world, a limbo concocted by the lurid theological imagination out of the elements of misinterpreted Biblical representation. Missing entirely the real world to which the hell experience of souls rightly appertained, they have fantastically fabricated an utterly spurious hell for which their Scriptures, when read with full comprehension of their deeper meaning, offer not a line of warrant.

This incredible blunder came in consequence of the entanglement of several threads of meaning flowing forth from the misinterpretation of one single term of symbolic reference and import in that language of recondite semanticism in which all those revered texts of Holy Writ were indited. (The loss of knowledge of this form and method of ancient Biblical writing was the initial cause of the total gross misinterpretation of the Scriptures.) The continued mistaking of the pristine purport of the spiritual allegories plunged the exegetists into the fatal error of misplacing in part the heaven, and wholly the hell experience. And this was primarily due to their failure to retain, or to apprehend at any time, the cryptic connotation of that single word of key significance in the symbolic lexicon of antiquity.

That word now looms up in the recovered science of arcane wisdom as the most strategically important in the entire dictionary of theology. It is the

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word "death", with its correlative terms "to die" and "the dead".

The initiated ancient Egyptian hierophants, the learned Hebrew tanaim and later the Church's own Alexandrian Fathers, notably Clement and Origen, and above all Philo, the Jewish philosopher of the first Christian century, all declared that underneath the literal surface meaning of the Scriptures astute intelligence could discern a far more subtle significance, hidden by allegorical cleverness under terms of common usage. As physical and material things must at any rate be used to adumbrate all spiritual conceptions and verities, the veiled language of symbolism employed objects and phenomena to pictorialize their abstract and recondite mysteries of the spirit. So it was that the sage authors of sacred books used the term and concept of physical death, the demise or decease of bodily life, as at once both the cover and the revelation of another death, not of body, but of soul, which was the cardinal principle of understanding in their sacred "science of the soul". Pledged on penalty of death in their Mystery Associations not to betray the secrets of their esoteric knowledge, their veiling of true sense under an outer physical fact was in this case most crafty, for the very paradoxical reason that they here attributed death to that one element or component of man's constitution which can never suffer death, - the soul. Bodies die, but souls do not. Upon separation of soul and body, so the Scriptures tell us, bodies return to dust, but souls return to God who gave them.

## THROUGH DEATH TO LIFE

How, then, we will be challenged, can it be declared that the central doctrine of all the sacred writings of old, the death and resurrection of divinity, refers to that very part of man which can not die? It is a legitimate challenge, but it can be met. The divine soul, sent by the Father to earth to inhabit a mortal body, can never die, in the sense of total extinction, or loss of being, else it could not return to its heavenly home after its term of life in body. But there is a form of "death", rather a state or condition of "deadness", a partial or semi-death, a torpidity, inertness, slumber, coma and veiling of full consciousness, which the soul was said to undergo when it first took residence in the earthly body, and in which it lay, like the human child in its cradle, until the body's growth to adulthood unfolded its dormant or latent powers to full manifestation. Plato denominated this state as the soul's loss of its divine memory, its descent into the realm of darkness and oblivion, out of which it would have to

struggle through the mists and fogs of earthly sense and the distractions of the passional nature arising from the side of body, to regain its lost Edenic felicity. Through the succession of many such descents and returns it pursues its evolutionary course from its infancy in elementary existence, through animal instinct, then human self-consciousness to eventual godhood. Like all things that live, God's immortal Sons must be begotten out of elemental essence of being, then created through birth in a body of the eternal Mother, matter. But while the soul lay in its initial long period of unawakened and undeveloped divine potential, the sages of antiquity expounded, it lay in "death". If it is to have its resurrection, it must suffer its "death". St. Paul so clearly states this feature of our psychogenesis when he writes (Ephesians 4:9): "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" - grossly mistaken, as this essay will demonstrate, for

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some supposititious region underground. "The first man is of the earth, earthy," declares St. Paul, and when the soul descends into body, which is composed of earthy elements, it truly can be said to have descended into the bowels of the earth. And this is that "death" from which it will have its ecstatic resurrection on its glorious "Easter morn".

This word "death", then, connotes both mythically and mystically, but most truly and actually, the anthropogenetic process in the soul's evolution, which is the central stone in the arch of the spiritual science delineated in the Scriptures. And the flagrant misreading of its recondite esoteric connotation as referring to ordinary bodily decease instead of its profounder mystical reference to the unawakened, or "dead" state of the soul in its initial incorporation in earthly body, has been the hidden source-spring of all the frightful insanities of theology and the idiocies of popular superstition that have grown, a rank crop of noxious weeds in the garden of human credence, out of a derationalization of the religious mind of Western humanity through the ignorant mistaking spiritual allegory for literal history.

The failure of ecclesiastical scholarship to retain, or recover, this proper sense of "death" and its mythical locale, the "underworld", or "lower earth" of religious dramatism, was in turn due to the attitude of inveterate contempt and hostility of the rabid early Christianity (which was not really Christianity, but a hybrid Christianity) toward antecedent Pagan systems of theological science. By turning deaf ears, unseeing eyes and closed minds upon the majestic ancient Chaldean, Greek and Egyptian philosophies, the Christian exegetists shut tight the one door, that leading out from the profound rational system of Greek thought, itself a derivative from still more ancient Egypt, which might have kept them in communication with the abstruse sense of this word of concealed wisdom, this fairy word of enlightening power, the occult meaning of "death". But, blind to that light-giving beam in the darkness, the assignment of a body reference to "death" bore the fateful consequence of shifting the locale of the meaning of the most important doctrine of theology from the world of man's conscious experience, subjective, mystical and spiritual, out into another world, objective, material and historical, in which world the physical realities are only the crystallized deposit of divine thought in matter. In the train of this shift of locale and reference, in the turning of religious thought outward upon the death and resurrection of that which must die and can have no resurrection, came that disastrous transfer of relevant significance of all the Scriptures, whose axial theme is the death and resurrection of a thing, the divine soul which can "die" and have its resurrection from the dead, from the area of man's ever-fateful soul life out into the area of inconsequential literal history.

With this stupid literalization of spiritual allegories in mythology and in the Scriptures ensued the stupefaction of theological genius, and that fatal inoculation of the general mind with a run of doctrines that stultified the common sense and unsettled the rational balance of sixty generations of Occidental life down to the present. And in the confusion of meaning and reference that followed upon this perversion of a cryptic sense there was tossed up like foam on the surface of this wrong connotation of "death" and its mislocation in a false and unreal world, or limbo of theological imagination, of three cardinal doctrines, those of the judgment, Purgatory and the hell-fire torment. The meaning of "death" having been turned outward upon the body - and that of one alleged historical person alone - inevitably the judgment, purgatory and the ordeal of hell-fire fell, in popular superstition, into a world localized in some region - never even yet definitely placed - into which

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souls passed after bodily demise here on earth. And the final deposit of common belief in the minds of the populace during all these centuries in the West has been the fixed persuasion that at physical death souls pass from earth to one or the other of the

two hypothetical chambers of an after-death mansion, the one exalted in character as heaven, the other deprecated as hell. With this crotchety caricature of the true ancient rationale of the fate of human souls after separation from bodies on earth, the Christian faith has corrupted the mental life of its millions of devotees over twenty centuries. With what consequences in the form of neurotic instability and mental derangement engendered by fear, by uncertainty, by credulity flouting all reason, by the warping of sanity through commitment to fantasies and falsities history volubly and tragically attests.

How the system of Christian theology thus blindly, to its everlasting hurt, stumbled and fell over the metaphorical significations of that single word "death" in the sacred tomes of antiquity is now oriented into true perspective for the first time since ancient days. The astute esoteric strategy of concealing the profoundest of conceptions under cryptic glyph and arcane symbol took a far heavier toll of mystification and deception than perhaps the esotericists ever expected to accrue from their designed methodology. It virtually wrecked Christianity. It afflicted with fatuity the rational genius of the Occident in all the field of religion and philosophy. The mistaking of spiritual allegories for ostensible history, the resultant conversion of ideal characters and type-figures into assumed historical persons, and then the mistiming of the "death" of the central god-figure in the mystery drama that resulted from the misreading soul-death as bodily death, along with the shifting of the fabled underworld, or Hades, from the present earth-life to the post-mortem hell, - all this interlocking confusion generated the entire distortion of the Christian theology into the most eccentric vitiation of sane anthropological science ever known in civilized society.

## "HE DESCENDED INTO HELL"

Faced with the final fixation of the popular mind in the belief of the soul's ascent to heaven or alternate descent to hell after earth-life, orthodox religion has had to reckon with the situation developing out of the implications and involvements arising from the body of early Christian literature, especially when these are examined for evidences of derivation from antecedent pagan sources. Furthermore certain passages in the Christian Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, themselves present elements constituting challenge and demanding explication or rationalization. For some of this material poses difficulties, provokes questions and stirs wonder or doubt.

One of these passages in particular turns out to have had a quite crucial part to play in the accommodation of Christian dogmatism to popular forms of belief as to the soul's after-death habitat and condition. When the central type-figure of our divinity in the ancient dramatic representations was transformed into the carnalized character of Jesus of Nazareth, all that pertained fittingly and luminously to him as mystic typism depicting its corresponding reality in man's nature had to be explained all afresh in a totally new frame of reference as relating to him in person. So his descending into hell after his death on the cross immediately gave rise in all naïve minds to the wonder - how it was that he, the perfect God, had to descend to a world still lower than this, into which the common theological assumption consigned only the

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sinner and the evildoer. But ecclesiasticism, basing its position on a few words in the Bible text, had an answer that appeared to cover the ground and resolve doubt. The potential dilemma was satisfactorily elucidated by the explanation that this descent of God's Son into the dark limbo of an underworld was a "special" mission, of only three days duration and for a specific purpose of benevolence in obedience to the Father's will. It was an extraordinary errand of divine mercy on behalf of those "spirits in prison", the souls of pre-Christian humanity and fell at an interval when, so to say, there was nothing else for Jesus to do. Jesus' sojourn of three days in the lower region of darkness was rationalized, for the appeasement of pietistic orthodox doubt, as in no way a natural necessity for the sacrificial Lamb of God, but as an act of divine condescension on his part to crown his mission of salvation to the race by extending it retrogressively back in time to cover all previous ages of humanity. He came to earth to save not only those who were fortunate enough to have been blessed with a knowledge of his message and those to come in the future, but as well those who, having lived prior to his advent, had missed his preaching on earth. With his soul released from body while it lay in the Palestinian tomb, he could readily devote the three days to a visit among the dead in the Plutonian underworld and convey his saving message to them. As he had given three years to preach salvation to the living on the earth, so he could give three days to a similar mission to the dead in the underworld. Before his glorious ascension he had this chore of cosmic justice to perform. And what better opportunity was there to attend to it than during the three days his



soulless body lay in the grave? His spirit, then free of the flesh, could project itself to Tartarus, to Gehinnom, to Tophet, to Avernus, to Sheol, to Amenta, to Hades, to hell, and bring the message of liberation to the hosts whose spirits, never having been christened with the oil of divine grace, awaited in darkness the coming of the light that would release them from the bonds of ignorance and the prison-house of death, as Isaiah had foretold.

Not only was the seeming inconsistency of the Lord's descent to hell thus met with a plausible explanation, but the answer itself was provided - and it was an answer of crucial consequence - to the glaring reflection that sprang up in even the most uncritical thought, as to what provision for salvation God had made for the multitudes living before his Son's advent. It was a fateful question. Theological discomfiture threatened the ecclesiastical system if a satisfactory answer was not forthcoming from the collegium of orthodoxy. Someone seized on the verses of the sacred script which told of Jesus' three days visit to the realm of Hades and his preaching to the spirits in prison there and it was happily adopted as a theoretical solution to the baffling query, one at any rate that could still the dangerous force of a sound logical challenge.

Few have ever stopped to reflect how implausible this quirk of Biblical "interpretation" really is, even if granted argumentative recognition. Of the millions presumed to be living at the year 33 A.D. only the tiniest fraction, a few thousand at most, even then heard the "glad tidings" in person, or by report or in literature. Millions, living since that time have lived and died without ever having heard of the Galilean carpenter's existence or his message. Even those hundreds who may actually have heard Jesus' discourses would have had but a sermon or two out of which to extract the essence of salvation's power. Along with that, granting Jesus' brief Good Friday to Easter visit and exhortation to the hosts of souls slumbering in death in this underworld, in what way, form, manner are we to conceive his having assembled and preached to those trillions of souls lying inert or groveling

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in Stygian darkness, how his voice could reach all of them? And it seems fair to ask how we can assure ourselves that, even with this colossal miracle magically achieved, the forty-eight hours of preaching could open the heavenly gates and the everlasting doors for the entry of the King of Glory into the life of all previous humanity. Granting the utmost of fairyland efficacy to the divine voice to work this propitious marvel, there is still the dubious question of God's justice and what the Hindus call karmic equity, in gratuitously causing all these trillions of the pre-Christian time to wait in duress, in darkness, in suspension - it is implied - of life and progress for thousands of years until, a bit suddenly, on two days of the spring of year 33 A.D., from a Friday until the Sunday falling first after the full moon of the Hebrew month Nisan, God finally sent his son down to earth, with a further side trip on down to Hades, with his physical body lying comatose in a rocky tomb in Judea, to release those hosts of benighted souls from the prison-house of Gehenna. (One who ventures to introduce a touch of realism into these sacred mysteries will be charged with irreverent scurrility).

Right here it might be observed that there could and should have been a hint of great enlightenment for all the Bible exegetists from ancient days to the present, if the significance of the fact that the Son of God went to both places, earth above and Hades below, for identically the same objective, the liberation of souls from the kingdom and power of spiritual darkness. Could they at the same time have weighed the import, in this connection, of the additional item well known to many scholars, that the ancient mythicizing Sages, the Egyptians first and then the Greeks, considered souls incarnated on earth as "the dead", needing rebirth and resurrection, they would have been in position to save the Western world from sixteen centuries of direful religious superstition. This essay will deal in particular with certain involvements of this situation.

It must now be seen that the old argument based on Jesus' descent to Hades never could merit the rating of a competent or tenable answer to the great challenge that confronts Christianity ineluctably. When the utmost is made of its potential, either as fact or as hypothesis, it still falls far short of logical adequacy. It leaves the Christian God still answerable to the challenge of human reason and human sincerity: why, if the Christian theological structure correctly rests on the asseveration of the power of the supercharged blood of his only Son shed on a wooden cross about the year 33 A.D., had he thus left the uncounted hosts of his children living on earth prior to that date (and other billions living since, but not even having heard of that power) without the provision of any means of salvation? It is at best a "solution" so weak that it is shameless for the religious hierarchy to continue using it as an answer to the grave challenge. The full measure of its incompetency, the abject hollowness of its pretence, have not hitherto been detected because of the obtuseness of orthodox scholarship with respect to the subtle

intimations carried by the Scriptural term "death" and the mythological "underworld". By the failure of mental acumen to grasp these arcane connotations, both the locale of this supposedly under-earth Hades and the identity of its population were wrongly determined, the result being that the whole structure of the scheme of salvation was thrown out of focus and turned topsy-turvy. And from the double misconception sprang the entire mass of gullible beliefs, the illogical and impossible superstitions of a Christian theology warped beyond recognition out of its original forms of intelligibility and beauty. It is the aim of this essay to divest these distorted structures of their false representations of meaning and to restore them to their first forms of sublime truth.

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This matter of the descent of Jesus to the realm of Hades during his three days in the tomb is in the general religious mind a thing of incidental occurrence and practically of no major or axial importance in the Christian theological purview. Quite on the contrary, it is, if not the central item of all Christian doctrinism, an integral element, link or indispensable part of the system. In the form of a short allegorical or dramatic paralogue, it is nothing less than the pronouncement of the divine incarnation itself. The descent of the Christ into Hades to "preach to the spirits in prison" is a compact dramatization of the descent of the collective units of God's sons, his mind-born spiritual progeny, into fleshly bodies in this Hades-world called earth. And what the drama represented as "his" (collectively their) "preaching" to the souls bound in darkness there, was their impartation of their Christly message of a new dispensation of life, charity and graciousness to the race of men once born on the physical basis of life, but not yet reborn on the spiritual plane. Their mission to earth was precisely to inaugurate, through the potency of their higher spiritual nature, that regeneration. The Hades into which their divine mission called them was this old earth, and the "prison" in which they lay fettered was this human fleshly body which the soul must put on to accommodate itself to the rigorous conditions of life on this planet.

The construction was just another of the variant parables or allegories adumbrating the basic principia of all theology, fabricated on a slightly different pattern from that of the Prodigal Son allegory, the parable of the Sower of the Seed, that of the treasure hidden in a napkin, and others. Because its identity of meaning with these was lost through interpretative blindness, it was falsely assumed to be the announcement of a visitation of Godhood to another limbo of lost souls beside the one we know so indubitably from our present experience. The Christ's descent to Hades was just the birth of the infant Sons of God ("Now are we the sons of God" - I John 3:2) into this earthly humanity that we affect to celebrate at Christmas. For this good earth that under religious persuasions we berate as evil is the only Hell, Hades, Sheol, Amenta, Avichi, Gehenna, Tartarus or Tophet of an underworld that souls from the empyrean have visited. Or at any rate it is the only one to which the Biblical allegories refer; there may of course be different hells for the life manifested on other planets. And we, living souls, are those "dead" lying inert in our graves which we call these human bodies. We are those "spirits in prison", those captives chained in the dark dungeons of this underworld. For the Greeks equated the body (soma) with the tomb (sema) by giving both the same name! In the profound Greek philosophy "souls were confined in bodies as in a prison or a grave". The mummy in its coffin was the Egyptian type-figure of a soul lying "dead" in its earthly body, its "grave" or "prison-house", awaiting the advent of the Christly power to release it. The spirit-soul was represented as the goddess Hathor confined in her "bird-cage of the soul" - the body of flesh.

This is the substance and the essential truth of the theology thus dramatically pictorialized in the ancient Scriptures. This is the Greek "descent of the soul" into physical embodiment on earth. This is the Fourth Gospel's "and was made flesh" of the cosmic Logos. This was that doctrine which Christian misconception travestied into the "fall of man into sin" from literal following of Genesis. And this, too, is man's rebellion against the passivity of heaven and his consequent expatriation therefrom and loss of Paradise, of Milton's great epic. There is no other "preaching" of Christhood to spirits in prison than that of the still small voice of conscience, which is the admonition of the evolving Christ-soul in the heart and mind of all humans. For

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this earth, the foster-mother of our divinity, is that "mount" on which deity came and stood to proclaim its message of its magical power to transform man's nature from that of the beast to that of the god. (The evidence for this etymological construction is clear throughout the ancient literature, but it is conclusively clinched by its derivation from the Latin word for "world" itself, mundus.) The "Sermon on the Mount" is just that discourse which our inner Christ consciousness preaches to us perennially throughout life on this stellar mount. But when this mount was literalized from its mundane reference and taken to be

some fictitious hill in Judea, again misconception perpetrated a most wretched caricature of precious truth.

## THE HARROWING OF HELL

Since, then, this item of creedology is one of crucial significance in all Christian doctrinism, it becomes necessary to reexamine it in the light of a deeper understanding of the ancient symbolic method of literary expression and of the principles of the occult soul-science cultivated by the sagacious theologists of old. The true import of the doctrine has been elaborated at full length and with succinct clarification of its subtle semantic intimations in the author's major works. But certain phases of its relation to the theological edifice in Christianity and the bearing upon it of numerous Biblical passages, as well as its extensive treatment in both the Patristic Christian and the Apocryphal literature of the early centuries, render a new survey of the theme eminently desirable.

Attention has been focused all afresh on this item by our recent perusal of a remarkable book dealing exhaustively with the doctrine from the distorted orthodox point of view, but marshalling the relevant data with a brilliant flourish of scholarship. It is the work entitled *The Harrowing of Hell*, by a prelate of the Anglican Church, J. A. MacCulloch, Canon of St. Ninian's Cathedral and Hon. Canon of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Cumbrae. It is sub-titled: *A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine*. It is thoroughgoing and ably handles the assemblage and classification of basic data. Praise must stop short there, for it completely misses the correct interpretation of the great doctrine it deals with, leaving the reader as deeply mystified by the strangeness of the doctrine itself and as abjectly confused by it all at the end as at the beginning. In fact in the way of a literary oddity it is a phenomenon of exceptional uniqueness. We venture to assert that in its interpretative theses it misses the true import of its data completely. And in addition to its freakish character in this respect it can claim an exceptional mark of queerness from the fact that at one or two places it actually advances the hint of what would make the true interpretation and as summarily discards it, clinging doggedly to the erroneous theses postulated by orthodoxy.

The book is, as said, a fine scholarly survey on a wide comparative basis of the universal ancient tradition of the Christ's descent to hell, the references to the doctrine being collated from a considerable library of the texts of the early Christian Fathers, exegetists and commentators, closely integrated with the texts from the Bible itself. This product of extensive research and correlation is a valuable one in spite of the entire miscarriage of the meaning, which is carried from its true locale of reference into a world in which the meaning cannot possibly apply. Error damns a book generally; but this work becomes, by way of accentuation of its true significance

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through sharp contrast with a false rendering, an exceptionally enlightening study through its very error.

As the doctrine assumed prominence in early dogmatic formulations, it received elaboration and imaginative reconstruction at the hands of the Christian writers, who presented it in the full array of all its poetic embellishment, its correlative features and its Pagan antecedent background. It is in the light of these ancillary particulars that the study here undertaken, by virtue of its application of the recovered lost keys to the arcane wisdom of olden time, can take on the character of a veritable new revelation of all Scriptural theology.

What becomes apparent first is the realization that the doctrine, with all its strange and mystifying features, had a far greater, more detailed and expanded exegesis in the Patristic, Apocryphal and Pseudo religious literature of the first five or six Christian centuries than it was accorded in the canonical Gospels, Epistles or the Apocalypse. In this range of evangelical writing it is seen as far from an isolated episode, an irrelevant occurrence of Gospel history. For it is found in close and integral connection with the whole main body of basic Christian doctrinism. But also it is the comparison of much material from diverse sources that accentuates the clashes, the inconsonance and the confusion in which the whole panorama of orthodox interpretation is from beginning to end ludicrously involved. It is the purpose here to elaborate and expose the major points of such confusion, as part of the effort to realign this important element of Christian creedology with a true comprehension.

MacCulloch's book gives us, so to say, the pegs on which to hang the cardinal issues of the discussion.



The legend of the descent of the deific power to an underworld and its wrestling there to overcome the forces of evil is almost universally present in the religions of the world. It is significant that this descent usually followed upon the hero's decease on earth. In this nether world the dead were believed to be detained until they were awakened, reanimated, liberated and led forth to regain an upper world of light and air through the sacrificial agency of the hero god, or other divine emissary. Death itself was personified, likewise Hades, as powers holding souls in captivity, so that the Son of God has to break their hold on the dead to set the prisoners free. Dramatically the old texts tell of the astonishment, dread and final panic of the rulers of Hades when the mighty light that radiates from the presence of the celestial person illumines the dark grottoes of hell. "Who is This King of Glory?" they cry in stupefied fright. "The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory," the voice of God resounds in reply. "The Lord mighty in battle." He has entered Hades to overthrow the powers of death and hell and bind the lord of the underworld in chains for the millennium. As he overcomes the reign of death he unbars the aeonial portals, he bursts the confining bolts of hell, he throws down the gates and topples the walls of the city of death and leads out to freedom the hosts of those lying inert.

Passages are found profusely in the various texts in which the souls bound in Hades, like Jonah in the belly of the great fish, raise their pleas to the heavenly Father that he will not suffer them to see corruption in Hades. The one in Acts (2:27) is notable: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Similar appeals from the soul in the underworld abound in the Old Testament.

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Again the symbol of "death" is exchanged for that of its twin brother "sleep". It is said that Jesus descended and preached "to them that slept." Those who had been held in some ill-defined condition of suspended life awaiting the coming of their liberator were often, as particularly in Egyptian lore, described as lying asleep in their coffins. The Christ is assigned the role and function of Awakener of the Dead. Resort is even had, as in Ezekiel, to the figure of bringing together dry bones, reconstituting them in their proper relation, clothing them with flesh, and restoring the organism to life. As Jesus descended after his death, conquered the powers of darkness and came forth victorious, he is said to have achieved resuscitation also for all the saints who, freed by his power to melt their bonds, ascended up to heaven with him.

MacCulloch shows that the theme of the descent formed a definite part of the teaching of the Apostles; but that they missed its true esoteric intent and relevance is as clear as anything can be.

The precincts of the underworld were guarded by powers in the service of death denominated by the Greeks Archons. They are the doorkeepers and wardens of Hades, and the souls bound under their guardianship have to wait for the coming of Jesus, who alone can free them. These jealous wardens have to be overcome, generally from stupefaction from terror inspired by the coming of the radiant One, if the enchained captives are to be released.

Many times the rite of burial accompanied the Saviour's "death" in the underworld; "dead and buried", as in the creed.

So prominent was the doctrine of the Christly descent to Hades in early Church theology that the Nicene-Constantinople Council of 381 A.D. condemned those who denied that the Lord, "in his reasonable soul", had descended to Hades. The first canon of the fourth Council of Toledo, 633 A.D., contains in Latin this statement: The Logos "descended to the lower regions that he might release the saints who were there detained, and he resurrected them from the vanquished rule of death." An early creed-form recites that the Logos descended into hell and trod down the sting of death. Dramatically, as St. Paul puts it, the victorious cries of those released from the despot's clutches hurl back at him the jubilant taunt, "O Grave, where is thy victory? O Death, where is thy sting?"

In certain writings God is said to have "remembered his righteous ones", or "his holy ones", or "his dead ones who slept in the land of sepulture." The Apocryphal Gospel of Peter has the phrase: "Hast thou preached to them that slept?" Jesus was heralded as the "first fruits of them that slept."

It may be injected here that the sheer stolidity of mind which permitted the Christian leaders early and late to read a literal sense into this "sleep" of the tenants of the fabled underworld, or Hades, thus giving it a quasi-historical significance, must be regarded

as a phenomenon of stupendous magnitude and singularity. In a thousand particulars the material of a spiritual allegory, which renders its message with sublime aptness and luminosity as long as it is taken as allegory, almost invariably becomes ridiculous and impossible when it is transposed into historical realism. The "preaching" of a Christ spirit to a race of men unawakened to mystico-spiritual apprehensions can be well considered and understood, and this is unquestionably the only true sense which this allegory was intended to convey. But it is surely illog-

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ical to read a meaning in any way factual into the objective reality of a man, a human person, while his body lay dead in a rocky tomb in Palestine, entering any such kingdom as Hades and addressing an audience of all the earth's past dead lying fast asleep. From any point of view that makes it realistic, it is a stupid and silly presupposition. And its acceptance as such testifies vociferously to the havoc that pietistic credulity can wreak upon uncritical minds. If one tries to recreate this scene realistically, the Christ stalking about among the billions of sleeping wraiths in the dark caverns of Hades, the utter senselessness of it all - redeemable to sense only if taken as poetic representation of spiritual reality - will preclude any rational acceptance of it. Its acceptability on any factual terms presupposes that all these countless dead were collected at one place if they were to be within hearing of the divine oration. Of course the whole matter gains credence in the religious mind on the presumption that spirits are not bound by the laws of the physical realm. It will be said that the Christ's voice in this preaching was not a vocal resonance, but a spiritual radiation that shot electrically through all the corridors of the underworld. However the irrationalities of the situation are to be "explained", it has to fall back on "miracle" in the end. And this is the inevitable resource whenever the ostensible framework of an allegory is transmuted into the alleged actuality of an event. It is sure to be the case that in the construction of allegory fancy creates situations that, like children's fairy tales, become fantastic, grotesque and bizarre when taken to be real objective occurrence. To be held in the category of history these things had to be classed as "miracles". Gerald Massey has, with irrefutable logic, found all the "miracles" performed by Jesus in the Gospels to have been pre-existent as allegories in old Egypt's immemorial literature. They were mythical constructions portraying the divine powers and attributes of the Christ figure of Horus, by dramatic representation.

## ALLEGORY BECOMES HISTORY

Much dramatism enters into the ancient sagacious efforts to portray the rejuvenating power of the Christ-spirit when it is awakened from its "dead" condition and takes its rightful leadership in the individual's evolution. Death in person (or Hades, also personified) is depicted as standing thunderstruck as he notes the entry into his kingdom of the radiant Son of God. He has been hitherto the undisputed conqueror of all those who, struck down by his hand, have entered his underworld house to be his victims and his prey. He sees the Christ enter and expects to make him his victim also. But he finds his prospective new subject unconquerable; not only that, he finds his own power being vanquished by the power of light. Overcome with dismay, he sees the Redeemer snatch from his grasp the multitudes whom he had held bound. The legend is that the Christ empties Hades of its occupants. Thus he conquers death and hell, as the Easter anthem chant.

At the appearance of Jesus in the lower world Death demands to know who this puissant challenger of his dominion may be. Whence has he this power to defy the monarch of the underworld, where all denizens are Death's subjects. He is seized with dread and trembles as the radiance of Jesus' glory sheds a brilliant light throughout the lower regions. Then he sees the graves of his dead opened and the dead come forth to follow the saviour as he leads them out into the full light of the upper world. Expressive indeed are the utterances which escape the lips of the Satanic monarch as he sees this radiant spirit "whom I am not able to grasp", dissolving the very doors and walls of his

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kingdom. Stricken with fear, he cries: "Who is this who extinguishes darkness with manifold splendor, nor permits me to rule over those who are mine, but draws souls given to me into Heaven? For this is the Christ who was crucified, by whom those who were below are brought on high, and those who were behind are set in front, when He rose from the dead, trod on Sheol, destroyed death by death and rising the third day, gave thanks to the Father." Death trembles, recoils and flees in terror at the

approach of the Christ-light in his underworld dominions.

Our author, MacCulloch, cites a scholar, von der Goltz, to uphold his theory that if the date assigned by the latter to Athanasius' de Virginitate is correct, such passages taken from this apocryphal document may well be the source of similar dramatic scenarios in the Testament of Our Lord, another uncanonical work, and both possibly inspiring some of the Gospel symbolism relative to the release of souls from death and the resurrection theme in general. Von der Goltz is mentioned as having suggested that for all such material some ancient Egyptian tradition, whose provenance can not be traced to original source, is being drawn upon. This is introduced here with the idea of showing that now and again, in spite of an inveterate reluctance to trace Christian material back to ancient Pagan backgrounds, scholars at times are forced to see what is the obvious factuality in this pursuit: that a body of literary treasures, all showing evident grounds of common source and kindred relationship, must have come down to the time of early Christianity from some antique fund of general wisdom, expressed in documents whose content and message form a unity of both expression and meaning. More than a few scholars have seen no way to bring a semblance of order and harmony out of a tangled exegetical situation in dealing with the Gospels and the Apocryphal literature save to assume that these religious books were based on "a common document" antecedent to the production of the extant literature. Yet this, the only credible conclusion in view of many redoubtable considerations, is generally rated as a random guess and at once abandoned. Unquestionably it is the one sure rock of exegetical criticism on which Biblical scholarship can take a stand. And with Gerald Massey's colossal array of the data of comparative religion to validate the thesis, von der Goltz must be right in surmising that some ancient Egyptian tradition has been drawn upon for this scenario of terror of the ruler of death. Massey indeed has traced all such links of connection between the Bible literature and antecedent Egyptian dramatism. Christianity will never regain its secure footing on a platform of inerrant truth until it follows Massey's prodigious revelations of the Egyptian source of all its literary treasure.

Emanating from a common source in remote Egyptian wisdom, the primal origin of which must be far older in time and far nearer a truly divine provenance than orthodox Christianity has ever been willing to concede, the majestic formulations of some surpassing intelligence that presented high truth in the garb of myth, drama, allegory and the semanticism of nature were disseminated by the "grapevine" of esoteric secrecy among the Mystery Brotherhoods and such associations as, particularly the Essenes and the Gnostics in many nations, who copied and preserved the sacred books which carried the thesaurus of wisdom in cryptic forms and idioms. Indeed no one - except, alas, a mind distorted out of rationality by the force of pietistic indoctrination and an indefeasible prejudice - can carry on the pursuit of documentary study of ancient religious literature without arriving at this inescapable conclusion. Comparative religion study has failed to reach this verdict with any unanimity only because of the recalcitrant obduracy of Christian anti-Pagan biases. It is time the simple interests of truth are accorded their rightful primacy over less vital considerations.

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Interesting sidelights - though all are integral elements of the ancient drama - are cast on the central theme of Christ's descent to hell by the efforts to identify those long-moribund tenants of the underworld who were to be resurrected and freed by the visit of the Logos to their subterranean dungeons. On this, as on several other items in the representation, Christian writers of the early centuries are much at variance and often in destructive contradiction. Some assume that the divine potency melts down all the bars of hell and releases all earth's previous dead en masse and empties and destroys hell in finality. Others are not so generous in granting an eventual salvation to all, as this would cheapen the value of salvation through the crucified Christ and weaken all claims as to the sole efficacy of the Christian path of redemption. If all the dead are to be saved, willy-nilly, what need of dying with Christ on his cross? Others limit the benison of release from hell to those who for a sufficient measure of repentance and turning from heathen error, of sincere yearning for the light, of inner purgation of sin and true piety, may have earned the right to receive the boon of the Savior's liberating power.

But there seems to have been rather general unanimity on the presumption that the coming of the divine liberator to the purlieus of the lower world would surely bring release and resurrection to the Patriarchs of the Old Dispensation, from Adam through Noah and the Israelite Fathers down to David at least. These had been God's agents of the Adamic first birth of humanity, and, like Moses, had led the race of mankind over the preparatory stages toward spiritual unfoldment, but were not to bring the full unction of divine grace to the world, since only the Christ himself could achieve that consummation. But when in the fullness of

time the Christ would come to visit the lower earth and release his saving power, then the time was fulfilled for the exaltation and apotheosization of the leaders of the fore-stage of human sanctification.

Yet this "liberal" concession to antecedent and non-Christian influence was not accorded without much reluctance, since ineluctably the early Christian mind was permeated with a hard repugnance against the Jews, on the general ground of the Jewish failure to acknowledge and welcome the man Jesus as the long-expected Messiah. There has always existed this great impasse between the two attitudes of Christian theology toward Judaism. On the one side the office of heralding and birthing the coming Messiah, as prophesied in the books of Jewish religion. Jesus came into a milieu that was prepared by the Jewish nation, this historical fact thus indicating God's choice of this people for the great honor. The coming Christ was to be born of the Jesse-David line of Jewish kings. Hebraism is therefore the initial stage of Christianity itself.

On the other side the Jewish adherence to strict formalism in religion prevented recognition and acceptance of the Christ when he came. Judaism rejected him as the fulfillment of its own prophetic heralding. It had therefore forfeited the right to receive the blessed unction of his deliverance of the dead when he visited the underworld. So that it was a considerable stretch of theological liberality for Christians to include even the Jewish Patriarchs in the category of those to be resurrected from Sheol and Gehenna. It was hardly to be supposed that the underworld visit of Jesus would free those who still stood in hostility to his message and his mission to the world. Yet on the wide theory that Jesus' descent ad inferos would give all those souls who had lived and died under the Old Dispensation their chance to partake of the redemptive power which Christ was to release for the reign of the new Dispensation, opinion was broadly expressed that the mercy and favor of

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God would open the prison doors to all except perhaps the most perversely wicked and evil souls detained in the "lower parts of the earth". One version asserted that Christ liberated all the dead in Hades except Cain, Judas and Herod. It is given as the problematic view of the Gnostic Marcion that the Jews in Hades would be found as stiff-necked as they had been on earth. Others presumed that Christ's descent was to raise all the dead.

One surely must conclude that allegorism and not history is being purveyed - and mistaken for history - in the stories extant in a number of the Apocryphal writings, to the effect that when Jesus opened the gates of hell the Patriarchs and holy men of old time emerged in body from their graves opened by the great earthquakes and even appeared and were seen in Jerusalem by people writing the accounts. When one reads enough of the literature foisted on the simple constituency of the early Church, dealing with wonders of faith, of healing, of miracle, one realizes how far the zeal of religious piety can override reason and subject the mind to the sweep of credulity. When allegories have been converted into historical events, all the resources of thaumaturgy must be called in to condition susceptible minds to their acceptance in defiance of logic.

Likewise the literal rendering of semantic constructions has made inevitable no end of confusion, since in the various dramatizations the authors used different terms in naming the graded states of consciousness through which man passes in his upward progress. Hell itself had many names, as Hades, Sheol, Gehenna (Gehinnom), Amenta, Tartarus, Avernus, Orcus, Tophet, the Tuat and others. Also heaven had a variety of synonymous designations, as the Elysian Fields, Olympus, Paradise, Eden, the Fields of Arru, Isles of the Blest, Beulah Land, Canaan, Jerusalem and more. Another term, apparently designating heaven introduced much confusion into the reading. This is the name given to the region into which the soul of Lazarus was carried after his death, - Abraham's bosom. No Christian believer could think of this hallowed place as other than heaven or its equivalent in blessedness.

But trouble arose when this localization appeared to be in conflict with the view that had become nearly universal in early Christian writing, that all souls at death (except only the Christian martyrs) descended to Hades! Residence in Hades, or a temporary and intermediate sojourn there, had not then assumed its eternal or indeed its condemnatory character at least in scholarly circles, as it did in later times. It was considered to be a region of temporary or transitional habitation for all souls following death, there to await the final separation of "the sheep and the goats" at the judgment.

But if all souls went at death to Hades, where was this place of seraphic bliss called Abraham's bosom? Here symbolism found itself impaled on the horns of a dilemma. If all souls went to Hades, but the sanctified Lazarus landed in Abraham's bosom,

then Hades must not be the underground land of darkness and misery, but a quite delectable homeland. In fact it makes Hades heaven itself! The Christian apologists cudged their brains to extricate themselves from this logical trap in which they found themselves caught, and came up with the only "explanation" in sight: that Abraham's bosom, though not the ultimate or highest heaven, was a pleasant section of Hades, a sort of special compartment of the dark underworld that was set aside as a fairly delightful abode where the souls of the righteous might find refreshment. In terms of metropolitan housing one is led to think of it as a penthouse apartment above the dark lower stories in hell's tenements. Though all go down to Hades from the earth, each soul goes into that section of the underworld justly allotted

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to it by karmic equity - although this is not stated in MacCulloch's volume.

It is evident on the face of it that the conception of Hades as we find it elaborated in the speculations of the early Fathers and Scriptural exegetists, is far from that simple idea of it which came to be current in popular thought in Christendom. It is not by any means unequivocally the "bad place" to which the wicked and the ungodly are despatched at death for eternal torture. All, the righteous and the wicked alike, had to abide in Hades till the time of the apocalypse. (The enlightened reader will hardly need to be reminded that the Greek phrase teleuten aion, which has been stupidly mistranslated "end of the world" is properly to be rendered "end of the cycle", or "end of the age".) Even that Edenic heaven, Abraham's bosom, where Lazarus had been taken to be rewarded for earthly poverty with celestial riches, had to be included in its province. The very Christ himself, either by providential design or for some reason of cosmic purport, was called upon to descend into this nether earth.

## MOSES ALSO DESCENDS

From the standpoint of sheer expediency the Church was fortunate that it could find at hand a plausible apologetic for this episode in the Scriptural narrative in the Christ's mission of preaching to the dead spirits in prison. His descent could therefore be haloed with the aura of a sacrificial condescension on the part of divinity, a gratuity divinely vouchsafed, not a cosmic compulsion or obligation. So Christian polity has rested on the assumption that Jesus' descent to the "bowels of the earth" was motivated by his divine compassion for the unfortunate dwellers in the underworld and that he undertook their release, since only through him could their prison bars be broken.

Had not the organic structure of the ancient esoteric systematism been totally lost, the theologians of the Church could have seen that the matter of the Lord's descent to the land of the dead was not a thing or whim or impulse on the part of the Son of God, left to his voluntary initiative, but was integrally in the order of beneficent evolutionary schematism. For it is the law of life in the ranks of graded being that the organic life on a higher plane must inject the seed of its potential renewal of life in the beings subsisting on the plane next below it in the scale. But sight was lost of this basic formula when the night of stark ignorance settled over the near-East nations in the centuries of decline of deeper spiritual science following the heyday of philosophical glory of the Periclean Age of Greece. The savage upsurge of resentment on the part of the illiterate masses against anything savoring of learning, had by the third century swept out of common ken all knowledge of the esoteric thesis of the soul's continued progression up the ladder of life through recurrent incarnations in earthly body. Hence along with the obsession of the idea of the limitation of earth experience to the one-only life, an idea at once overwhelmingly destructive of any philosophical attitude toward life on earth, there fell upon the general mind the persuasion of the finality of death, once its reference had been shifted from the spiritual deadening of the soul while in the body to the decease of the body itself. Here and here alone is the formula of understanding that recreates the psychical environment which in that direful third century transmogrified the nascent Christianity from its original character of Gnostic wisdom to a scarecrow caricature of that wisdom, a veritable fetish worship of symbols and images carnalized and petrified by literalism.

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Christian theology from the start found itself impaled on its affirmation of the Biblical declaration that there was no other way to salvation than through the historical Jesus and him crucified. It was on this thesis logically confronted with the obligation of



effecting some link between this Savior and all earth's antecedent dead, so that those also might meet, know and profit by the grace of salvation. Hence the avidity with which the apologists of the faith seized upon the three days visit of Jesus to the nether world. The pietistic Church Father Cyprian quotes in Latin the statement in I Peter 4:6: "For in this also it was preached to the dead, in order that they might be brought again to life."

The obtuseness of perception on the part of Christian scholars can be vividly sensed if one turns back to a passage in Exodus 19:10, 11, where a perfect analogue of the descent of divinity and preaching "to the people" is found. Cyprian, blind to the clear implications of such a construction of esoteric adroitness pointing to the non-historicity of a similar event in the "life" of Jesus, expressly cites it as proof of that event's historicity. The citation runs: "The Lord said to Moses, Descend and testify to the people, and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothing and be ready against the day after tomorrow. For on the third day the Lord will descend upon Mount Sinai." Quoting these verses MacCulloch asks if this means that Moses was a forerunner of Jesus to Hades, heralding the Lord's coming there, - another John the Baptist. Obviously what it means is just what the orthodox commentators have obdurately refused to see: that all such recurrences of theme are elements of the arcane allegorism of ancient writing, and not real as objective occurrences at all. Not historical as events, they are yet realities in the life of man spiritual, for they present to the mind the veridical forms of spiritual reality. As far as it goes, this little sketch of the soul's advent and incarnation on earth is item for item a parologue of the New Testament's descent and preaching of Jesus. As long, of course, as the venerable Scriptures are envisaged as literal history of one ancient people, instead of typegraphs of the form and meaning of human life, no theologian would be in a thousand years of identifying "Moses" of the Old Testament with John the Baptist of the New. Moses himself could not enter the Promised Land, but prepared the way for the full-fledged "Jesus" (Joshua) to cross the Jordan into the land flowing with milk and honey. "Moses" therefore is the way-opener in evolution for the advent of Christly spirit power, and stands to Joshua as John the Baptist stands to Jesus. It is well to point out several identities in the two constructions. God sent his "one-ly born" Son down to earth, and this mission entailed his descent to Hades; rather, be it said categorically, this was that descent to Hades. In the Old Testament allegory, the Lord ordered Moses to descend. Jesus descended and preached to them three days (two actually); Moses' exhortation was to continue for two days, ending on the third day.

Here we have an astonishing parallelism, if not patent identity, between an alleged episode in the life of the first-century character Jesus and a very similar incident in the life of Moses. This is by no means an isolated instance of such close similarity between Jesus and one or other of the prominent characters in the Old Testament, - not to overlook the one hundred and eighty such identities between Jesus and the certainly non-existent Horus, the long antecedent tygal Christ of ancient Egypt. Yet - let it be emphasized to the last degree of its significance, Christian scholars have for two thousand years stood face to face with these evidences of the non-factuality, the non-

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historicity of the life of Jesus in the Gospels, yet continue to deny the existence of any evidence to indicate that the Christian literature was derived in any direct or significant measure from antecedent Pagan sources. Our scholar MacCulloch concludes his book with reiterations of a statement to this effect. He does allow derivation of Christian material from Hebraism, by some subtlety of classification dissociating Jews from the category of Pagans.

This item of parallelism confronts Christian theology with another problem. Let it be borne in mind that in the Christian book of apologetics, the descent and the three-days preaching of Jesus was the only opportunity made available to the billions of humanity living before 33 A.D. for their salvation. Yet here is the Old Testament's recital of a precisely similar descent and spiritual sanctification, which on a historical basis of interpretation and reckoning would have occurred some fifteen hundred years before Jesus came to Hades. The people that had to be preached out of the region of darkness and sin into the blessedness of beatification in three days had at least once before (and several other like situations are to be found in the literature of old Egypt) been visited by divine messengers and had the door of salvation opened to them. All this (and many similar complications) throws contradiction and confusion into the counsels of Christian exegetics.

But - the riposte will come - we are comparing two things that have no connection or relation whatever, since Jesus' descent was to spirits in the prison of Hades, or hell, a region allocated in the purely spiritual state of being; whereas Moses was sent

down to a group of living people on this earth, in Palestine or in the Sinai district of Egypt. How can we classify these two men as identical characters, performing the same mission, when they were as different historical personages as were Caesar and Napoleon. So will the argument run as long as one contends for the historical character of the Scriptures.

Two men in history are of course two men, distinct and individual. But in allegory a dozen "men" with different names can all "be" one and the same character, and "he" not a living man of history, but a type-figure of some element in man's make-up. And this, one can assert with positiveness, is what the main Biblical figures are, in both Old and New Testaments. Yes, "Jesus" descended to hell and "Moses" went down on Mount Sinai, and we venture to flout all the authority of orthodox Christian theology by proclaiming that this allegorism is one of many solid reasons why one can now positively assert that "hell" and "Mount Sinai" are one and the same place! And that place is neither under (the surface of) this earth, nor in spirit-land, nor in the territory of Egypt, the country in north-east Africa, but is just this good old earth itself!

The cryptic, but clear intimation of every reference to this place to which, in all ancient Scriptures, a divine here descends, leads a discerning mind to the perception at last that the dark underworld, the hell and Hades of theology is our rolling globe.

Forever settled, then, is the early Fathers' dispute over who goes down to hell, when they do so, and who are awakened, and also where. For earth, of course, is the site of the universal school of evolutionary education for all those mind-born Sons of God for whom cosmic fate decreed a set task in the economy of life in this corner of the galaxy. Also this earth is the "underworld" of all mythology and theology, as being "under" the empyrean, or heaven, which is the undisputed point of departure for all entities sent "down" to a lower sphere of life.

The first misjudgment that threw off the unschooled early interpreters was

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the failure to grasp this proper signification of "under". Under is always relative to what is above; and since all the allegorical depictions of spiritual situations or processes in the Scriptures were - erroneously - taken to refer to the man Jesus in his earthly historical objectivity, naturally every reference to his descent into a lower world was naïvely taken to be an account of a journey which he took from this earth into a lower limbo. Never has it dawned upon purblind religious zealotry that this descent was the transition of a unit of divine soul from a higher world than ours and down into man's constitution, not from man's station on earth into a place below our world, but spirit's descent from a heaven above us to us men on earth. We men on earth are those "spirits in prison", lying dormant, unawakened, those spiritually "dead" in their tombs of flesh. There is abundant certification of all this scattered widely over the field of ancient literature. But it is irrefutably demonstrated by the identity of the Greek words soma for "body" and sema for "tomb". For a long time the infant soul of potential deity implanted "from above" as the Scriptures have it, lies deeply buried under the weight of the lower animal nature and instincts, until these are gradually overcome and it is resurrected from this "dead" condition. In this elucidation is covertly hidden the core of significance of all theology, and its rediscovery after nineteen centuries of oblivion will inaugurate a new Reformation in all Western religion far transcending in range, depth and significance the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. It will for the first time enable the twisted scheme of Christian theology to reestablish its harmony with that wondrously beautiful structure of esoteric wisdom from which it veered so tragically far away in the third century. The ancient light that Christianity dimmed and well nigh extinguished will be rekindled and in the clear view of truth which it will provide can be constructed that one-world religion that alone can give peace to the earth, the fervent dream of idealist humanity. For the realization at last that the consciousness of man here on earth is the arena of a potential heaven of blessedness and a very present hell of ignorance and benightedness of the spirit is the great "lost key" to the true meaning of the Scriptures, the lost clue also to the cryptic purport of all mythology. All religions will go on misunderstanding the illuminating message of their ancient Bibles until they rebase their interpretations on this rebuilt foundation.

It is only when a mind enlightened with this clearer view scans the Scriptures anew that it becomes sharply aware of the unconscionable asininity of many constructions in these venerable tomes when they are rendered as literal history. It takes bright light to reveal the grotesqueness of the bogies that bad vision has created in the darkness. For instance in the text we have quoted from Exodus the Lord instructs Moses to order the people to "wash their clothing" to be ready for reception of the Lord when he descended on the third day. Esoteric symbolism uses natural phenomena and physical objects to analogize

spiritual realities, but unless the mind can lift its conceptions from the phenomena or the objects to the noumenal realities thus objectified, the outer picture will generally remain bizarre or ludicrous. Looked at realistically the scene of a general or national washday for the children of Israel can yield humorous suggestions. But, with the esoteric key to the marvelous language of symbolism it is readily seen that the "clothing" that souls put on as they descend from ethereal realms to earth is the several bodies of coarser matter overlaid finally by the physical body, and that the impurity which these bodies catch from contact with the earth necessitates cleaning if the soul itself is not to be contaminated. How exalted the sense and inspiring the incentive to nobler living, when one grasps the loftier conception deftly woven into the allegory, that man must purge his lower "clothing" of its accum-

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ulated dross of animalism, sensualism and coarseness and refine it till it shines with spiritual purity. Should the moral of this situation need elaboration, it can be said simply that obviously the edifying power of this Scriptural presentation, typical of hundreds of others, would be immeasurably, almost magically, enhanced, if the sublime spiritual connotation is apprehended instead of a Monday's washtub operation. When one takes the serpent of Genesis as a snake, takes the ark as a wooden boat floating on a universal flood covering the mountain-tops, takes Jonah's great fish as a mammoth whale, the cross as two wooden beams, the resurrection as the re-animation of a physical cadaver, one succeeds only in clamping his mind down to the dead level of pure idolatry, worshipping the symbol and remaining blind to what in a higher world of conceptuality it was intended to symbolize. The literal interpreters of the Bible are the greatest of the idolaters.

## CONFUSION WORSE CONFOUNDED

The whole theological situation as regards the descent of deity to save man became involved in an inextricable tangle through the misreading of allegory and the confusion of two worlds where only one under two different names was intended. The confusion put in doubt the sheer matter of the direction, up or down, in which the dead were to move in proceeding to their cosmic destination, be that destination heaven, or hell and Hades. Already we have seen the muddle of inconsistency and contradiction created by the clash of ideas as to the heavenly destination of the good and the journey of the wicked to hell or Hades. One must go through such a book as MacCulloch's to gain a realizing sense of how hopelessly Christian thinking and believing over the centuries have been mired in the absurdities of the traditional tenets of the Church covering this localization of the prospective post-mortem residence of souls. If all the orthodox were to read such a work, they would be horrified to realize that, on their own Christian teaching, they will not be able to determine whether at death they will go up to a better world above, or down to a Hades below. The confusion is so unresolvable that even up and down, heaven and hell, Paradise and Hades are indistinguishable.

Then imagine how much more their astonishment will be intensified if they are told, as now they can be told, that the matter of their going either up to heaven or down to hell is not, in theological meaning, in the remotest degree related to the question of where their souls will go following bodily decease on earth. This can be stated categorically and without possible refutation, because it is now seen that the directions taken by souls in descending and ascending have no reference to what transpires at what we call death, but refer always and only to the direction taken by souls descending from heaven to earth for incarnation, and ascending from earth back to heaven on their return. If that area of non-physical existence out of which souls migrate to earth be the region which religions have denominated "heaven", and on some basis of relativity in a scale of gradation it be considered to lie "above" our world, then souls have but one place to go on departing this life in body. They must return to heaven. The seer in the Old Testament portrayed their shuttling up and down between earth and heaven under the figure of angels ascending and descending Jacob's ladder. St. Paul makes this interpretation clear when he says, speaking of the Christ spirit: "Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?" If souls are

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to return to God, they must first have left his kingdom above and descended to earth. This certainly at once reduces the possible localities and directions of the soul's journeyings and returns to two, from heaven to earth and back again.

But, the literalist will heckle, this eliminates hell, or Hades, from the picture. Surely the Scriptures do not deceive us when they tell us of the terrors of the underworld.

The logic of the situation begins to point to interesting conclusions. If there is no journeying for souls other than the shuttling back and forth between heaven above and earth beneath, logic leaves the case open but for one verdict. We have to conclude that as both earth and hell are located by all religious systems as lying below the realm called heaven, these two, earth and hell, must be one and the same place; and this same place must be the fabled "underworld". Let any intelligent mind examine the material collated in MacCulloch's book - though it is glaring at us in nearly every book that surveys the field of early Christian writing - and it will be convinced by the overwhelming evidence that, behind the forms of a cryptic disguise, the theological hell is located nowhere else than on this earth and that the so-called "dead" are souls here incarnated.

If there is one popular and universal conception that has remained fixed in the essential simplicity of truth - among so many that mass thought has wretchedly vitiated - it is the general idea that life on this earth, by and large, is a tragic experience of hard toil, loss, pain, suffering and ultimate defeat, and that death comes as a fortunate release like that of a prisoner freed from miserable confinement. Here for once naïve popular belief agrees with the profundities of Greek philosophy. It is everywhere the instinctive religious conviction that souls thus released from the ordeal of existence in this world find surcease, rest and peace in heaven. Not only that, but nearly every better religion in the world postulates the soul's re-entry into a state of celestial bliss after enduring the strenuous hardships of life "down here".

How completely at sixes and sevens the Christian ideas are found to be will become almost ludicrously apparent when it is seen how exactly divergent the various positions are. It is at one and the same instant believed that all souls return to peace, rest and comparative happiness through death's door. Yet consistently expounded and upheld in the writings of the early Christian leaders is the doctrine that all souls go down to Hades after death. Here we see general Christian belief clashing with the tenets of Christian theology. The up-or-down itinerary awaiting their souls at death is thus a completely uncertain one for all Christians. No answer that carries positive assurance can be given even now. The misreading of Scriptural allegory as objective history has thrown the whole great debate into a battle of conflicting ideas. The Christian faith has yet no logical or philosophically grounded assurance to give its millions of devotees as to whether at death their released souls will ascend to the conventional heaven of peace and bliss, or descend to a Hades pictured in horrific colors as a region of darkness and torment. In this parlous condition does the most boastful religion in the world leave its people dangling.

A light to aid the mind, whether of Christian or other faith, to discern the truth that earth is the hell and Hades of theology (and mythology) and the locale positively indicated as the point of reference of these terms in the revered Scriptures, illumines our understanding when this idea of "release"

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is scrutinized. Universal and instinctive is the naïve assumption, the natural belief, and indeed man's most positive source of cheer and consolation in every hard situation, that bodily death will bring life's suffering and tragedy to an end. With death the stern conflict is ended; "the strife is o'er, the battle done, the victory of life is won." This faith is so strong that it can support the desperate anguish of suicide. The common consolation that assuages death's sorrow is that the dread visitor brings release.

It will therefore fall as an astounding disclosure to the ordinary Christian mind that the basic theology of the Fathers of the religion directly controverts this comforting belief, robs the believer of his hope of heaven and, horrible to contemplate, casts his soul down to Hades. Only those enraptured spirits whose bodies, covered with pitch, had served as torches in Nero's gardens, or been mangled with the lion's gory claws in the amphitheater, escaped the descent to Hades. All, both the righteous and the wicked, pass down to Hades, there to await release at some distant epoch vaguely termed the Judgment Day. What must be the consternation of the devout Christian on learning that the theology of his faith, so far from assuring him of a blessed transition at death from the woes of earth to the glories of heaven, dooms him to confinement for an aeon in the dark caverns of hell! What must be his dismay when he finds it was the teaching of the founders of his Church that death would simply transfer his soul from one dreadful region to another still more frightful! To die was only to step from the frying-pan of the hell on earth into the fires of hell itself. It was but to exchange one "durance vile" for another presumably far more vile. If he reads the holy words of the sanctified Fathers of his Faith he will have to revise his expectations and resign himself to taking the dark



downward journey to the diabolical underworld, there to agonize for unknown ages.

From this dismal prospect escape is to be made only by awakening his torpid mind to sufficient sharpness to read aright his own Scriptures, interpreting them as allegories of his soul's strenuous experience in this world, which is the only hell or Hades ever contemplated by the ancient sages who indited those sacred books, and release from which will free him to enter whatever grade of a heavenly consciousness his stage of evolutionary progress will make possible for him.

Here as elsewhere, Christian doctrinism runs into a closed lane, a trap manufactured by its own misreading of ancient poetic delineation of the conscious experience of divine souls in mortal bodies. How clear it comes through to understanding now that, since souls both on earth and in Hades are pictured as spirits in prison waiting the coming of Horus, or Jesus, of Balder, or Izdubar, or Marduk or other Savior to effect their release and their transition to a higher world of light and happiness, these two places, earth and Hades, must be the one single underworld from whose gloomy chambers the Christ power lodged in their own constitution must release them. This Christ within them is the only power that can burst asunder the bolts and bars of this soma-sema body-tomb which is their prison-house until the resurrection.

In the sublime language of ancient figurative genius earth was portrayed in the character of warder of souls, a place of fiery torment for the infant Sons of God, stern despot tyrannizing over the lives of those entities unfortunate enough, by their childhood waywardness to have fallen from a Paradise of innocence and halcyon blessedness down into his kingdom of darkness. Yet earth, matter being ever the "eternal feminine", was at the same time the holy Mother of those mind-born Sons of God. And a true and balanced philosophy discerned

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that the "captivity" and "bondage" of these celestial juveniles - the "Innocents" of Biblical allegorism - was as propitious an evolutionary situation for them as is the tutelage of a human child in the home of its mother. As St. Paul puts it in fourth Galatians, the young progeny of God in their childhood had to be put under "tutors and guardians" until the time of the perfection of their own matured powers. Nature, matter, that great Goddess Isis, "the Mother of all the Living", is this stern but fostering madonna of infant souls.

It is notable that MacCulloch, the author of the important book review, The Harrowing or Hell, seems to have taken no notice of the singular fact that in the excerpt quoted by him from Cyprian, there was the descent of two persons, two figures. The Lord bade Moses "descend and testify to the people" so that they might be prepared to receive the Lord, who would descend upon Mount Sinai on the third day. How is this complication to be understood? The only plausible elucidation, in harmony with the postulates of ancient occult knowledge, seems to emerge in studying the character and office of Moses, the forerunner and way-opener of Joshua (Jesus) - for the names are identical - and discerning that Moses bears to Joshua the same relation as John the Baptist bears to Jesus. Moses in Old Testament allegory and John in the New Testament stand as the first or natural man, who himself can not enter the kingdom of heaven, but who comes first to prepare the way for the advent of the "second man", the spiritual "Lord from heaven". Life must be established "down" here in the natural world, physis, as the Greeks called it, if it is to bear and mother God's children of the spirit. So "Moses" must represent this grade of life involved in the lower world of matter. Consciousness is under the rule of life in the physical sphere before, at the symbolic age of twelve, like the boy at puberty, it begins to turn to the "things of the Father", mind and spirit. "When we were yet children", says St. Paul in Fourth Galatians, "we were in bondage to them that by nature are no gods" but the powers of physis, what he calls "elementals of the earth" and "elements of the world." But when nature's preparatory work shall have made ready the physical conditions that will enable the higher frequencies and shorter wave lengths of the higher gamuts of consciousness to find expression, the Lord Christ will descend in his turn to awaken dormant capability and lead the developed soul out from under the strict motherhood of nature's fixed laws into "the liberty of the sons of God." This transition carries consciousness from bondage to the letter of the law which killeth under the "old dispensation" over into the freedom of the spirit which giveth life under the new dispensation.

Yet all this evident clarity of elucidation remains still buried in the obscurity of incomprehension because of failure to grasp the symbolic significance of "Mount Sinai". The grand meaning of this heritage of wisdom will be lost as long as this Sinai (and the six other sacred mountains) is stupidly taken to be the supposed hill in northeastern Egypt. As explained before, "mount," "mountain," "holy hill," "hill of the Lord," "mount of Sin," "mount of the moon" and indeed finally the "mount of earth," is ancient



semantic usage for the earth itself. And this is the final attestation - and it closes at last the blatant mouths of crass-minded Fundamentalists and literalists - that all the Scriptural transactions, such as the temptation, the crucifixion, the "sermon," the transfiguration and the ascension, all of which were allegorically localized "on the mount," simply transpire in the life and evolution of man on this old earth. "Sinai" incidentally derives etymologically from the Egyptian seni, senai, meaning "point of turning to return," and this earth is precisely that nadir point down to which souls descend, and there turn to return to the Father above! This is an item of scholarly discovery that carries in its single implication a whole revolution in Biblical exegesis. Mount Sinai is just this world and it is indeed the valley of the shadow of death.

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## IS HADES UNDER THE EARTH?

Inevitably we will be reminded that in the Genesis account of creation and elsewhere in the Bible not only are two regions spoken of, but three are clearly distinguished. The story narrates that God created things in heaven, on earth and under the earth. MacCulloch quotes Hippolytus as saying that Christ was ordained Lord of things in heaven, on earth and under the earth (Greek *kata chthonia*). MacCulloch's explanation of this is that Christ became man to live as and among men and thus transfigure manhood with divinity: that he ruled things under the earth in order that, as one who submitted to mortal death and thereby could preach to the dead of past time, he might overcome death by combating and defeating its dread power in its own realm. Here it can again be clearly seen that early theological thought equated death with life in the ancient representation. But here again literalism wrecks the proper sense of allegory. Any third locality apart from heaven and earth that is listed as pertaining to man in the old sacred books, is meaningless and non-existent. If it is postulated in the history of man it is a baseless figment of bad literary bungling. A region physically located "under the earth" in the sense of beneath the ground surface, can have no place in the field of man's evolutionary activity. If man lives some eighty years on earth, then has to spend a period of comparatively vaster length in the bowels of the earth, physically considered, why has not the Christian theology given due accentuation to a feature of such startling character? Christian exegesis here has been caught by a Biblical phrase, wholly missing its real import and through the fallacy of a literal interpretation entangling itself in an illogical complex. Only the esoteric approach and methodology in Scriptural reading, which it rejects with fright at every turn, can rescue it from its own disordered creedology.

Man stands at a point which might be considered about midway in the scale and gamut of being between the natural energies below him and the spiritual grades of consciousness above him. He is thus balanced between heaven above him and the subordinate and preparatory orders of life below him. As his place in the cosmos was on earth, his life had to be lived in a subordinate relation to the life of higher beings in heaven above and in a superior relation to inferior creatures below his station. A comprehensive reference to his position would have to cover, so to say, the three stories of his place of residence in the universe, his own story, the earth, the next story above, and the kingdom immediately below, or "under the earth". This lower region would extend over the three kingdoms below man in the evolution of life, animal, vegetable and mineral, and presumably the sub-elemental, sub-atomic level of life which our wondrous modern science is now exploring. But as a physical locality in which any part of man's redemptive process is alleged to take place, the region so vaguely, so indeterminately fancied to exist down under the earth in any physical sense, is again a fictional delusion of the theological brain, straining to make ends meet in carrying allegory over into literal realism.

Having seen in the Exodus passage that an Old Testament forerunner of the Jesus (Joshua) descent to the lower world, namely Moses, preceded the descent of the true divine Lord, we should register no surprise on finding that the early Christian commentaries similarly have John the Baptist preceding the descent of Jesus to the prison-house below. Must not, then, this place of descent of deity be one and the same place? As New Testament "history" is uncompromisingly held to be fulfillment of Old Testament "prophecy" is it not

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entirely legitimate to assume that the locale in which the fulfillment takes place is the locale in which it did take place? Otherwise it would not be the fulfillment of the given prophecy. The great lost and stubbornly resisted truth of all this is, - mirabile dictu - that neither is the Old Testament to be taken as objective prophecy of future events believed to have been fulfilled in the first

century A.D., nor is the New Testament a record of the fulfillment of such alleged prophecy. All these utterances in both books, as Gerald Massey indubitably demonstrates, are allegories of man's experience in his line of march up the ladder of being, grossly mistaken in the Old Testament for prophecies and in the New for miracles. The world owes - but refuses ungraciously to requite - to Gerald Massey an incalculable debt for showing us that the same "miracles" that are enumerated in the Gospels as the demonstration of Jesus' divinity, are found ages before his advent in old Egyptian books as spiritual apologies.

Clement of Alexandria is broad and liberal enough to include "righteous Pagans", as well as the sainted Patriarchs of the Old Testament among those dead in the underworld who are to be rescued by the Lord's preaching in Hades. A chapter in his Miscellanies treats of a passage cited from The Shepherd of Hermas in which even the apostles preach and baptized in Hades. With even such a direct hint of the identity of Hades with earth under their eyes, the scholars still remained blind to the truth. Are we to take it that the apostles, as well as Jesus, descended to Hades and preached to the spirits in prison? And how could they have done so when they were still alive in body during the three days of Jesus' visit to the underworld? And if not at that time, when in their lives did they make this extraordinary visit?

Clement does divide the righteous Jews and Pagans from the sinners in Hades. "Who in his senses," he asks, would charge Providence with injustice and suppose souls of the righteous and those of sinners to be under one condemnation?" MacCulloch suggests that Clement might logically have included even the sinners themselves as privileged to hear the crucial underworld sermonizing of Jesus, as they could hardly be expected to repent without some exhortation from divine power above them. Clement seems to have held rigidly to the applicability of the "chained" and "those in prison" to Jews and Gentiles. Christians of course were not in such lowly or precarious condition. It is not to be missed in passing how completely MacCulloch fails to see a slip of logic in Clement's comment to the effect that righteous Jews were entitled to hear the precious preaching in Hades on the ground that they, too, needed the chance to repent. This is one of those numerous little traps of logic in which the inveterate prejudices now and again have caught Christian theorizers, involving them in bizarre situations. For how can it be logical to hold that a "righteous Jew" or Pagan should need to repent? When has righteousness become something that needs to be absolved by repentance? Is it not unrighteousness that calls for repentance? We are forced to the conclusion that in early Christian ideology righteousness absolved a Christian, but not a Jew. It seems that even MacCulloch's statement carries the assumption that a righteous Jew is under condemnation and needs repentance, not for being righteous, but for being a Jew! If one is not correct in an analysis of this sort, one has to wonder whether logic has a place in religious thinking at all. And if righteousness does not count on a soul's credit balance, one has to wonder what is the good of being righteous. But Christian mentality was caught in this anomaly because in truth Christian doctrine is loud in proclaiming that one's best righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of God. Not your righteousness, but only the mercy of God will save you. And in early Christian presumption, righteousness would certainly not have absolved one from the sin of being a Jew or a Pagan.

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Clement quotes The Shepherd of Hermas document as saying that while Christ preached to the long-dead Jewish Patriarchs and "good" Jews in Hades, the apostles preached to the Gentiles who were ready for conversion. This Apocryphal book states that the apostles "went down with them into the water, and again came up." We have universally been told that Hades is a place where souls are tortured in the flames of an undying fire. What shibboleth in popular parlance is more common than "hot as hell?" Books on Christian theology combed the dictionary for terms adequate to picture the fierceness of hell's igneous fury. From Dante's Inferno to the modern cinema we have seen the troops of souls writhing in agony in the unquenchable fires of hell.

But how different the picture we find here! The apostles are said to have gone down to this same Hades to help Jesus save the hordes of the dead, but it was water into which they plunged, not fire! So here ancient semantic ingenuity, in typifying the lower level of life, switched from the symbolism of fire to that of water. Our learned author, MacCulloch appears to take no notice of this drastic shift in the symbolism. Shall we guess that it provoked a momentary puzzlement or impasse in his mind and that, with no solution at hand, he dodged the obligation to discuss it?

For owing to the theological position and attitudes of Christian systematism there is still wanting the capability of elucidating the semantic usages in Biblical writing. Nature does not limit her epiphany of truth to one objectification, one phenomenon.

Emerson has said that God is present in all his parts in every moss, cobweb and blade of grass. Therefore more than one of her elements may serve to enlighten the human mind with an apt ideation of a given truth. Truly enough has the underworld into which the soul units of God's fatherhood have descended for life's benison of experience to evolve divine potential by overcoming the inertia of matter has been characterized in symbolic language by the Egyptians as the "crucible of the great house of flame," or the "fiery furnace" of Scriptural imagery. At the same time, but from another angle of poetization, this lower bodily habitat of incarnated souls is depicted as the place where souls are in imminent danger of drowning in its deep waters. For the physical bodies which souls inhabit in this underworld are composed of seven-eighths water and one-eighth earthy elements. This combination of earth and water gives the "certain mire" of Plato's symbolic depiction and the "miry clay" of the Bible Psalmist, in which the soul finds itself bogged down here in body. The fire symbolism pertains to the spiritual energies and potencies of the soul, the water poetizes the coarser nature of matter and body. Soul's incarnation in watery body bring the two elements into interaction and conflict; the water struggles to extinguish the fire, the fire endeavors to dry up the water. Raging sense can overwhelm soul as water quenches fire; spirit can overcome rampant sense as the sun's fiery rays dry up the streams. For man this conflict, this battle of Armageddon, becomes more than poetry, for it is the actuality of every moment of his living experience in this life. It is the great aeonial battle that Genesis describes as being fought on the border of the salt marshes, or in the valley of Siddim (a paraphrase for Sodom), which it says is the salt sea. When it is seen that Sodom is a cover for sodium chloride, which is the chemical name for salt, and when to this astonishing datum is added the still more amazing fact that human body blood is identical in chemical composition with sea salt water - biological evolution of life having issued from the sea, with salt water in its veins, so to say - the mind of the Western world can at last open up to the understanding that the mighty battle between spirit and matter is fought right here in the valley of the salt marshes of the human body blood, which, being sea water and turned red by oxidation in the lungs, is the Red Sea which all

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souls must cross by night, when spirit is immersed in the water and the darkness of corporeal existence on earth. Should we be surprised to find that it was while fleeing Sodom that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt? As "history" these narratives baffle and perturb the human mind; as allegories they vividly enlighten it.

Any one knows that when the higher energies of fire are brought in touch with water they cause it to boil. They throw it into agitation and separate the oxygen from the hydrogen. Spirit duplicates this action by stirring into vigorous motion the sensual elements of consciousness and separating the hydrogen (water) from the oxygen (air), or in the psychic field separating emotion (water) from mind (air). So this salt water of our body blood, when acted upon by the higher fires of the spirit, can veritably boil with the surging energies of lust, passion, elemental animal fury and frenzy. These - be it known at last - are the fires of Tophet and all the underground hells of Scripture. This knowledge will grant to Western man for the first time the inestimable boon of releasing him forever from the religiously inspired fear of future torment in hell's fires, since he will understand that he is in those raging fires now and by wisdom he can turn them into their true power to refine the dross of his nature into the pure gold of spiritual light. (It is not strange that the words "light" and "gold" are identical or nearly so in many languages).

Clear to us also with this elucidation come the meanings of the Biblical "thrice refined in the fire" and the ordeal by water, or the baptism. Souls must both be baptized in the water of earthly body and thrice refined in the fires of that same life. So that the two symbols go hand in hand in semantic portrayal of our life here.

It is most interesting to note how symbolism becomes almost indiscriminately blended into seeming meaninglessness in a passage taken from Origen's exegetical commentary on Luke. Here the tree, the way, the river, fire and water are jumbled together with no evident perception of their semantic implications. But his presentments so aptly accentuate the correctness of our dissertation on the duplex association of fire and water in the life and body of man that there is warrant for quoting them. He says that there is a fiery river through which all must pass on the way to the tree of life in Paradise. As souls pass over this river, says Origen, they receive a baptism of fire. Did not the tongue of flame mount on the head of Jesus at the end of his baptism in the Jordan? Missing the solid import of all this symbolism, MacCulloch says that this baptism of fire cannot harm the righteous, but all who pass through it without being harmed, pass on to Paradise. Here the obvious inference is that if you are not righteous, the fiery baptism will harm you, and you could use this experience in it to tell whether you were righteous or not. All this becomes silly when it is known that the test of the fiery baptism is indeed the temptation under which all souls must go,

the ordeal of living in a body of water, which our fiery forces of feeling and will may heat up until, as was said in old Egypt, you are "scalded thereby." It is true enough to say that the fire can not harm the righteous, but all souls are something less than righteous before they develop the intelligence and self-control to stabilize their righteous character, and its various degrees of burning are themselves the elements and influences that shape human life to righteousness.

Origen, whose discernment in dealing with the symbols and allegories was usually keener than that of the other Church Fathers, took a more rigid stand, asserting that earth retained all those devoured in Hades.

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## DRAMA IN THE UNDERWORLD

God himself in the Old Testament says: "I send down to death and I raise up again." The sons of Israel go down to "Egypt" and later make their exodus. Abraham and Moses descend into "Egypt" and again come up. In the Gospels Jesus is secreted in "Egypt" and returns. Paul asserts that if the Christ is to ascend he must first have descended. Every seed, the divine as well as the vegetable, or the human sperm, must be buried in the body of mother matter if it is to have a resurrection and a new life. Water has been the universal ancient symbol of matter. As matter itself nurses within its deepest bosom (as we now so well know) the soul of fire, so water holds the electric potency of fire within its bosom, as any thunder-storm demonstrates. These two, fire and water, are the inseparable dual potencies in man's combined association of body and soul, flesh and spirit. A chapter in the Egyptian Book of the Dead is entitled "Of boiling water in the underworld and not being scalded thereby." These venerable Scriptures also say that souls were sent down to earth to "cause a burning within the sea." So earth must be Hades.

In view of all this would it not be legitimate for us to paraphrase Clement's rhetorical question and ask: "Who in his senses would presume to charge Providence with the idiotic scheme of providing no natural way for the progressive education of the souls of his own beloved children over millions of years and then suddenly decide to retrieve this lost time and sad neglect by sending one only of his sons, while his body lay inert in a rocky tomb in Judea on a Friday and Saturday of the year 33 A.D., down to a spooky Hades and through a few hours of his "preaching" redeeming a very uncertainly determined portion of hell's dead (though somehow still living) population held there over thousands of years? Are we not warranted in wondering why Clement, or why MacCulloch or a thousand other Christian scholars have not asked, then answered, this and related questions?

An incidental detail brought out in many of the apocryphal scripts is that those dead in the underworld did not see the form of Jesus, but heard his voice. On the contrary, other aspects of the description assert that at his appearance his body shed a blazing light about him, illuminating the darkest recesses of the cavernous dungeons.

Not only was Jesus' descent to earth's bowels heralded by a forerunner, John the Baptist, but as his advent to earth was prophesied long in advance by the seers of the Old Testament, so would his redemptive sally into the domain of the lower powers be foretold by these same prophets. Those who proclaimed his coming to earth likewise announced it in Hades. Every place, Origin argued, had need of Christ, and therefore he needed his prophets in every world he visited. This most learned of the Church Fathers, whose discernment of the profounder sense of the symbols and allegories was far keener than that of the other early exegetists, took a more rigid stand as to those who were to be freed by the Christ's preaching, asserting that the earth retained all those devoured in Hades. Language so loosely employed as this is virtually useless for definite meaning. How can souls be devoured by death or any other agency and still remain intact? Scholars have not discerned that many terms used in the ancient Scriptural language of symbolism can not carry their factual meaning into the world of abstract conception, and must be understood as the shadows of ideal things, the outward signs of inner and invisible truths. The Bible literalists have never caught the idea that the death which God declared

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would be the penalty for first man's eating the forbidden fruit was a death that did not kill its victim, but let him survive. So here the devouring of souls by death and hell must be seen as meaning simply that souls have been separated from their human bodies and are thereafter in Hade's realm. In this intended sense it is figuratively true that death "devours" all humans.

And could any Christian tell us what specific location is meant by the "bowels of the earth" and the "lower parts of the earth?" It



can hardly be taken other than literally, but so taken it can have no recognizable identity. This region is as fatuous a chimera of theological hallucination as would be the asserted location of heaven a few miles above the earth. Literalism in such things is deceptive because states of consciousness are incommensurable with physical dimensions. The dimensions in a physical world can be merely suggestive of spiritual dimensions. As Vergil located the door to the underworld near the Sibyl's cave at Cumae in Italy, possibly Christian literalists will encourage us to believe that we may soon use space ships to locate heaven. According to all this Christian speculation of minds teased and buffeted by the legerdemain of ancient allegorism, Jesus must be presumed to have gone down somewhere in the earth's physical underground to reach and preach to the captive spirits held there. Or are we to take it that he merely descended the six feet to grave level and flitted about over the cemeteries preaching and awakening the dead? If the Christian theologians cannot tell us with specificity where we are to place this prison-house of the dead that Jesus visited, they ought to cease bandying about the terms in loose fashion. They do but mystify and confuse. Celsus, in his argument which Origen recasts in Contra Celsum, makes his dramatic spokesman, the Jew, remind Origen that the fabled descent of many heroes, such as Orpheus, Hercules, Theseus, Aeneas, are "juggling impossibilities," and that the Christian dogma of Christ's descent is just as hollow as the others. Origen rebuts this with the statement that Christ's descent and resurrection were not mythical; they were indeed real and factual. Celsus ridicules the Christian assertion that Jesus went to Hades to convert those sequestered there, seeing he had signally failed to persuade the living on earth. If he could not win living men on earth, how is it to be supposed that he could, in forty-eight hours, redeem all unregenerate antiquity in Hades? This assignment would indeed call for some cosmic wizardry in the doing.

Origen expressed the opinion that St. Paul, too, was in Hades after his death. Being the apostle to the Gentiles, in particular, it would be supposed that Gentiles dead would need his preaching in Hades as well as Gentiles living above.

Those accepting Christ on his preaching are translated from Hades to Paradise. Origen curiously grades the order in which those in Hades will recognize and accept the descending Lord and ascend with him: those see him first who yearningly have looked for his coming; of non-Christian believers the prophets next respond; then all the other righteous ones; then the sinners in the Christian fold; then the outsiders, the Gentiles. The theorizing capabilities of the theological imagination are well demonstrated here.

A number of the ecclesiastical writers, notably Ephrem Syrus, recite dialogues between personified Death, Satan, Sin and Hades. Death upbraids Satan and Hades for thinking they could easily catch or trap and overcome Jesus as he entered their domain. He berates them for fleeing in panic at the sight of the Master entering the underworld, or cringing in fright as they see Jesus stealing away their captives. Much is made of the idea of Satan or Hell es-

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saying to catch Jesus on a great hook which they throw at him. It turns out that the hook rebounds and impales its throwers instead. In anticipation these dark powers exult at seeing their prospective new prey approach their province and they eagerly await the moment of his capture as that of any other mortal. But they stand petrified with terror or are thrown back as his majesty confounds them. Death is heard expressing his amazement on seeing that his powers can not enthrall the Shining One. Christ came irresistibly on, plundered the storehouses and emptied the treasuries of Hades. Death was swallowed up by Life after Life seemingly had been devoured by Death.

The sublime apostrophe in the Psalms exhorting the everlasting gates to be lifted up and the King of Glory to come in, is definitely part of the underworld drama. Christ fought for three days and nights (wasn't he supposed to be preaching?) in his battle to blast the powers of death, and when the victory is won the cry goes up for the lifting up the gates and the everlasting refrain: "O Grave, where is thy victory? O Death, where is thy sting?" The angels then inquire: "Who is this King of Glory?" And the Christ answers: "The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory; the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."

St. Augustine registers puzzlement as to the nature, location and grade, so to say, of the underworld of death. He can not regard the word inferus (lower) as used in any good sense. The good people should not go down. It seems absurd, he hints, to think that the ancient saints who believed in the future coming of Christ could have been retained in places far removed from the wicked, yet shared with the inferos, or "below" ones. Doubtless he was caught in the dilemma which is clearly discerned in Christ's saying to the thief on one of the other crosses at the crucifixion: "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." If "this



day" is considered one of the three (two) days Jesus was to be preaching and fighting in Hades, here is an overlap which involves Jesus' presence in both Paradise and Hades at the same time. It would be resolved if Paradise and Hades could be regarded as being the same place. But this outlandishly flouts all Christian persuasion. MacCulloch elucidates Augustine's belief that Paradise can be no part of heaven (sad news to piously expectant believers), since Christ, or at any rate his soul, went ad inferos. Paradise, he infers, is then that nether place into which Christ descended. He visited the prisoners in the darkest, lowest penal section, but not those in Abraham's Bosom or in Paradise. Could otherwise capable minds be any worse entangled in skulduggery, hopelessly victimized by senseless literalism?

Augustine is greatly perplexed that Christ's descent should have completely emptied hell's purlieus. To free all the captives there would compromise God's justice in his punishment of the vile sinners of the past and the wicked generally, would nullify its efficacy and rob it of its due power. If all the past wicked were to be freed into blessedness above, how could God's just judgments be carried out in equity? Those evil transgressors whom God had to overwhelm in the flood, how could they be counted worthy of forgiveness and divine favor? On those terms hell could not be a place of everlasting damnation. Augustine denies that Abraham's Bosom - much less Paradise - was an integral part of the infernal regions. Augustine stands confounded by these puzzles.

One gleam of at least partial light flashes on the saint's mind when he speculates that the "spirits in prison" may be considered to be souls still resident in bodies, but enshrouded in the darkness of ignorance. And he guesses that perhaps the preaching to the dead need not refer to an oratorical present-

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ment in Hades, but simply exhortation to those spiritual dead right here on earth. Having shared Plotinus' studies under Ammonias Saccas, Augustine could not have been ignorant of the latent esoteric sense of Scripture. Could he here have been enunciating what he knew to be the occult truth of the matter under the slight disguise of poetic speculation?

Cyril of Jerusalem ventures so far into the allegory as to mention Jonah's captivity in the whale as typical of Christ's descent.

In a document called The Odes of Solomon the symbolic interrelation of the baptism doctrine with the descent to Hades is brought out. The "abyss" of darkness is closely associated with water as symbol. Dramatism depicted the waters, like the gate guardians in Hades, as being terrified at Jesus' approach and their ensouling elemental beings fleeing in terror. Water of course is overcome by fire and vanishes away. But for fire to combat the water and extinguish it was the achievement of victory of spirit over matter. So the baptism meant "death", then resurrection from its thralldom. We see how clearly this relation of the soul's "death" to incarnation in a watery body is shown in St. Paul's statement, referring to Christ: "We suffer death with him in his baptism."

In a so-called Gospel of Peter, Docetic in character, there is described a scene that has suggestive semantic implications. Two men descend in the night from heaven and all radiant with light, enter the sepulcher. They emerge carrying a third body, and a cross follows them. The heads of the two men reach to heaven; that of the third even extends beyond. A voice out of heaven is heard asking: "Hast thou preached to them that slept?" And from the cross a voice is heard in reply: "Yea." What can all this mean but that the two powers of life, the radiant spirit and the equally radiant light of atomic matter, descend onto the field of lower creation, symbolized as the tomb of death for the cosmic light, and in the end of the cycle emerge with their product and progeny the Christ consciousness, which is greater than they? If these ancient constructions are not to yield meaning that is related to reality, but otherwise have to be "explained" as miracles, what are they but worthless rubbish?

In another document, The Epistle of the Apostles, the Christ says: "I descended to the place of Lazarus and preached to the righteous and the prophets." Is the raising of "dead" Lazarus in John's Gospel presumed, then, not to have been enacted in Judea, but down in the theological after-death underworld of Hades?

Another old book, The Ascension of Isaiah, tells how Isaiah is conducted by an angel through the seventh, or highest heaven, and, beholding the blessed righteous there, is told that although these are now in possession of their "garments of the upper world," they will not be given their crowns and thrones until the Christ descends into the world in the last days. He will not be

recognized as divine, but taken as a man and crucified. When he has despoiled the powers of death he will ascend on the final day accompanied by many righteous, who will then receive their garments of glory. A feature notable in this is that it is a precise copy of the transactions allocated always elsewhere to Hades, but here clearly enacted on earth. It is another hint to those of open eye and mind that the allegorical Hades is earth itself.

MacCulloch reveals that baptism was known in the early Church as "illumination" (Greek photismos), and from this hint guesses that references in certain apocryphal documents to "enlightenment" may relate to baptism. The association of two things so elementally distinct as illumination, a purely spirit-

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ual development, and baptism, a physical performance, has proved too bewildering for the theological acumen of centuries. Water extinguishes fire and its light. How, then, can it be a suggestive symbol of illumination? The challenge to our semantic sense should not be too overpowering. The sense is readily apprehended when one closely considers the elements entering into the problem. Baptism clearly connotes immersion of the soul's fiery nature under the water of the body. Experience in that watery habitat eventuates in the soul's spiritual illumination. As out of watery clouds flashes the lightning, so out of the watery baptism comes illumination. St. Paul (I Cor. 15:29) indeed refers to baptism "for the dead." Frequently in the old writings the effects of baptism have been equated with the experience of the descent. Baptism took place on Easter Eve, intimating that renewal of life which incarnation brings. Christ's coming into Hades always shed a great light, and the advent, the entry of spirit into and under the water of body, is the baptism.

In The Ascension of Isaiah, this prophet hears the Father commission his son, the Christ, to descend to the firmament and to this world and to the angel in Sheol, but not to Haguel, which is a Hebrew variant for Gehenna itself. This could be very significant, seeming to say that the soul should go no lower than the earth. MacCulloch suggests that this Isaiah document may be a work of Gnostic influence. The Gnostics had not fallen into the trap of literalism, and this fact makes their writings taboo to the orthodox Christian scholar. But MacCulloch is frank enough to say that when one reads many of these texts "in the Gnostic sense," one gathers the impression that the word "Hades" would seem to mean this earth! Here for a moment the biased Christian mind caught the tail of the truth, but could not hold on to it. The light was rejected, and simply because it was - Gnostic. Having been pronounced heretics, the Gnostics must be disparaged at every turn. MacCulloch also admits that there may have been influence exerted upon these constructions from the side of mythology! How extensive this influence surely was he would be more than surprised to know. He states that Marcion could not have been a true Gnostic because he did not believe in a descensus ad inferos. It has never come to his discernment that true Gnostics certainly believed in the descent of deity into the underworld, but were sagacious enough to know that they were in it right here in this life and therefore did not look for it in some sub-terra region.

## THE TREE AND THE CROSS

Origen's poetic fancy that there is a river through which all must pass on the way to the tree of life in Paradise holds intimations of deep symbolic meaning for the discerning mind. The association of the tree with the river in the Scriptures is a common feature of naturographic literary art of the ancient day. The righteous, says the Psalms, shall be like a green bay tree, or a tree planted by a river of waters, and his leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Furthermore the simile enhances the analogical suggestiveness by having the tree planted on both sides of the river of waters. For the soul in the flesh draws the vigor of its life from both the matter side and the spirit side of the stream. The Christian Fathers were here dealing with Pagan symbolism whose esoteric and mystical significance completely eluded them.

In Genesis we have the river of life, which is a poetization of the

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radiation of God's creative energies, proceeding from the throne of the universe, where at the fountainhead of creation there stood the tree of life in the garden. There was the source-spring of all life and the tree of generation by the spring. The tree and the river are kindred symbols. If one takes the tracing of the branching arms of a river, such as the Mississippi, on the map, the design looks so like the branches of a tree as to be almost identical. Like a tree the stream of living creation issues in one primary conduit or channel, then divides and again sub-sub-divides precisely like the structure of a tree. The idea is simply that of a line of force emanating from one source through one mouth and then branching out into multiple streams. The Norse mythology represented the life-tree, Ygdrasil, first as rooted in heaven and extending its branches downward; then with its roots in matter below, growing upward and spreading its branches out in heaven. This is a true symbolic picturing, because the stream of creative life proceeds from heavenly source above and flows downward toward matter. Then, having rooted itself in matter, it begins an upward growth that will return it, bearing its ripened fruit, to its source in Paradise. What life sends out and plants as seed in the springtime of each cycle it will bear back to heavenly source a hundred-fold in the autumn.

Emphasizing the tree symbolism the ancient sages poetized that as it was the same river that bore life potential out at the start and returned it in manifold measure, so it was the same tree that grew up beside the head-spring of the stream which was to bear for man the end fruit of his evolution. Hence there are many allusions in the allegoric literature to the salvation of man through his partaking of the fruit of the same tree whose eating in the Genesis scenario was to plunge him into the throes of this underworld "death". Doubling up on the symbolism of man's involvement in "sin" through his first progenitor's eating of the "forbidden" fruit of the tree of natural life, and his being saved by a spiritual rebirth through the sacrifice of the second-man-Adam on the tree (cross) of Calvary, ancient semantic genius formulated the legend that the tree (cross) of Golgotha had sprung from a shoot of the primal tree of life in Paradise. As man fell through the agency of the tree, so he would be regenerated and saved by the same tree, when its seed had evolved to the point of producing its fruit. The symbolism is perfect; it is only the theologism of stupid literalists that has distorted and blurred the picture till the beauty of its design can not be seen. Poetic legend asserted that the wood of the cross on which the Christ was crucified was cut from the tree of life in the garden, or from one of its distant descendents. "Tree" is used for cross with great frequency, the two being interchangeable.

A close parallel to this figurism is that of Christ's birth being a new and late budding from Jesse's stem or rod, that put forth new shoots at Christmas, like the Glastonbury thorn at the Yule, in English tradition.

If this seems far-fetched, it is singularly attested as genuine by an odd fact in the Christian Bible itself. This Scripture both begins and ends with the tree of life. It is the heart of the Genesis account of creation, as all know. Not so well known, however, is the fact that the last chapter (22) of the Book of Revelation directly asserts the right of all to partake of the fruit of the tree of life, which, it declares most interestingly, shall bear twelve manner of fruits upon its branches, and that by eating of them, man may "enter in through the gates into the city" of heavenly felicity.

Through the counsels of folly generated in the theological mind by the twisting of Scriptural allegory into ostensible history, the true meaning of the cross, as well as that of the tree, has been flagrantly misconceived. In

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fact the meaning as purveyed in ecclesiastical systematism stands as practically the reverse of its true significance, turned just about upside down. It has been made the symbol of death, whereas its connotation positively is life itself. The gruesome Christian imagery of the man-Christ dying in agony on the wooden cross, has stamped the emblem on all minds as the insignium of (physical) death for man, its bitter repulsiveness being little assuaged by the promise of resurrection glory soon to follow. To the Christian mind the crucifix carries the reminder of Jesus' death, his paying the penalty, the ransom, for man's sin. In eighteen centuries of Christian preaching there has not been one hint that this death of Christ on the cross was death in any other form or significance than the bodily demise of the man Jesus. So far from carrying the connotation of life, this was the death that put an end to life. Living hardship and final extinction of life is the suggestive emblemism of the cross in Christianity. The grim reaper had his victory and his ghoulish triumph.

It was not so understood in pre-Christian Egypt. Certainly one of the most ancient forms of the cross, if not the very most ancient, was the great ankh-cross, the crux ansata, of ancient Egypt. It was the plain capital T, capped by the circle of the sun. It was the upright straight line I and the circle O conjoined in the relationship of living polarity, the union of positive and

negative, and as such it symbolized not death but life. The truth of this elucidation is irrefutable, for the ankh symbol is the old Egyptian hieroglyphic word for life. It is also the word for "love" and "tie," since life is generated only when positive and negative energies are tied together by a binding power, love.

The blunder which led to the Christian mistake of making the cross the sign of physical death instead of life is an amazing one and has not been clarified hitherto. As indicated in the early part of this essay, our life on earth was dramatized by ancient mystic semanticism as the "death" of the soul as it proceeded from on high and poured out its life-blood for the sake of the animal entities whose bodies it was to ensoul. Theologically, on the esoteric side, the soul's descent into body entailed its initial "death" on the cross of matter, for the very purpose of giving life to the body. This "death" figurative and relative to be sure, but real in the esoteric sense, was to be ended "in the fullness of time" by the soul's new cycle of growth and ultimate resurrection out of the body, bringing to an end the necessity of further incarnation in bodies of earthly type. It is all to be understood in simplest form by analogy with the grain of wheat which the farmer sows in the autumn and sends down to a winter of "death" in the soil. It lies there "dead," but in the turn of the cycle to spring it bursts out of its tomb and rises to new glory of life under the power of the sun. For the descending incarnating soul it is the same process. The twelve aspects of man's potential divinity go down into matter in the embryonic form of seed. Old Testament symbolism denominated the material ground-level of life "Egypt," since this country lay just immediately south and west of Palestine, the two directions in which the sun moves from summer zenith to winter nadir. In the turn of the cycle from "death" to rebirth the twelvefold divinity makes its exodus out of "Egypt," crossing the "Red Sea" of the human body blood, and returns above.

The symbol of the cross has only the most incidental relation to death, its significance bearing solidly on life. It is the relative "death" of soul while entombed here in the flesh that led to the intimate association of the cross with death. It can be seen now that in the esoteric sense the cross does indeed symbolize death, but it is the relative "death" of one part of man's being for the very purpose of giving life to another part which can have no

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existence without it. Divinity must "die" that humanity may live in the flesh. Spirit must "die" if matter is to have organic being. Yes, the cross is the symbol of death, but it is a "death" that is the very core of life. Spiritual death and physical life play see-saw with each other, likewise spiritual life and physical death, the one rising as the other sinks in their interrelation. This has been expressed with singular clarity in the statement of John the Baptist in comparing his status and function with those of Jesus: "He must increase, but I must decrease." Thales, the first Greek philosopher, put it that the one component of life, spirit, "lived the death" of the other, matter, and vice versa. Does not all religion assert that spirit lives more abundantly when body dies? This side of the equation has survived in general thought; but long forgotten is the equally true dictum that body lives more abundantly as spirit pours out its life-blood to ensoul it. We die daily unto the body, says St. Paul, that we may live more fully in the spirit. "For me to die is gain," the apostle says.

It can now - at last - be seen that this failure to read "death" in its proper, but deeply esoteric connotation, pointing its reference to the soul instead of to the body is the factor that has involved Christian theology in the hopeless entanglement and irrationality of the ideas carried by the words crucifixion, cross, tree, grave, burial, and resurrection. The true inner meaning never had anything to do with a death by physical crucifixion on a wooden cross, and burial in and resurrection from a rocky hillside grave in Palestine or anywhere else. Its positive sole reference was always to the "death" of soul, and that "death" comparable analogically to the "death" of organic life when it subsists only in seed form. Life must start each new cycle afresh from seed, and in a seed the "soul" of the potential development lies, relatively, "dead". It will awake to the renewal of its life at the spring turn of the winter cycle. The soul in humans is precisely related to its body as the seed is to the soil; it lies inert, awaiting the new springtime, summer and autumn harvest time of its appointed course. The mistake of reading our bodily death for the soul's seed-stage torpidity has been the single greatest and most tragically ruinous misconception in all the history of humanity's religious culture.

Reverting a moment to the significant symbolism of the tree we are surprised to find this item of typology connected directly with another of the most general symbols of the divine element in man. This symbol is "oil," and this substance is the base of the great and exalted title given to the central figure in all the Mystery dramas, in Greek the Christos, in Hebrew-Egyptian the

Messiah. Both words mean "the Anointed One." And oil was the substance for the anointing.

## THE OIL OF GLADNESS

The occult appropriateness of oil as symbol of divinity seems not to have been recognized and certainly was never made generally known. To be anointed in Christhood was to have the spirit of love and truth lighted up in human consciousness in a benignant celestial glow. In the first place oil is, as it were, the inner essence of a vegetable, extracted by pressure under proper conditions. The spirit matches this in being the innermost holy of holies of man's organism and it is also brought out to manifestation under the stresses and pressures of bodily experience. Again oil is the fuel for fire, and the anointing of the

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head with it prefigures the lighting up of the fires of consciousness to burn with the clear flames of love and beauty. Lastly, oil when it lies thin on a flat surface, displays the seven colors of the spectroscope, the natural reflection of the glory of the Lord. With still other analogies to demonstrate its appropriateness, it would be hard to find another substance so aptly analogizing the idea of our radiant divinity.

Now it turns up that in the Gospel of Nicodemus in a section dealing with the Descensus to Hades, the allegory runs that Seth goes to Paradise to seek the oil of mercy from the tree of life. The story is said to have been taken from the Jewish Apocalypse of Moses. There are many references in archaic literature to the oil or ointment drawn from the tree of life. This was a commonplace symbolism in the old books. And MacCulloch tells us that the contrast of the tree of knowledge with the tree of the cross was frequent in early Catholic writings. The abstract conception behind all this emblemism is that as man became channel for and wielder of the living energies flowing out from the heart of God in the branching river-tree of his creative effort, he was to extract through karmic pressure the innermost and most dynamic power of life, the flaming fire of divine life and the God consciousness.

Oil extracted from the tree of life, equivalent symbolically to the juice of its fruit, the intoxicating "spirit" pressed out of the grape, honey gathered from the flower blossom, the exquisite color of petals distilled out of the sap of the green stem of the rose bush, all these and other natural processes that dramatize the generation of a unit of spirit's conscious power in a long material evolution - like an ounce of radium distilled out of tons of coal - analogize the unfoldment of the Christ nature out of the first-man-Adam stage of physical evolution. First that which is natural, says the apostle Paul, then that which is spiritual, with the spiritual supervening upon the natural as its topmost product. To anoint man's head with the "oil of gladness" is to enact in ritual the transfusion into his human nature of the higher and more luminous powers of deific consciousness. An object "anointed" with oil presents a shining appearance. Is it too much to expect that even modern concreteness of conception should see the relevance or catch the exactness of the analogue between making one's head shine with the sleek sheen of oil and causing one's mind to be enlightened with the brightness of God's more beauteous spiritual radiation? The figure uses the outer physical shining of oil on the head to adumbrate the head's interior shining with the glow of divine consciousness. Are we such dull children that we must have some geni explain to us the semantic aptness of the simplest natural analogies?

In the Gospel of Nicodemus the drama represents Hades as asking Jesus as he appears in the underworld: "Who art thou that pourest thy divine light on those blinded by the darkness of sins?" One must be crass indeed not to see that such a question would apply with infinitely more aptness to mental darkness of souls right here on earth than to absence of sunlight in underground grottoes.

In dissertating on the story in the Gospel of Nicodemus MacCulloch says that Christ's advent in Hades is a reduplication of his first coming on earth. Even this hint fails to enlighten closed minds. He commends the author of this "apocryphon" for cleverness in the use of literary artifice in a highly imaginative construction, crediting him with mastership of true dramatic power. He speculates as to how the book's author gained knowledge of events in Hades. One would have to wonder about this. But no wonderment need have been felt had it been known that the spiritual poets of olden time gained knowledge of

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Hades simply by observing the world under their eye, since this world is that Hades. MacCulloch even asserts that this author presents the descensus story in such concise and integrated form as to make it a treatise on the philosophy of history, with the Christ as the central figure, making the history understandable as the demonstration of Christian theological structure. But where would philosophy have a history, on earth or in Hades? Certainly not in Hades if that realm is somewhere below the earth. But it could have its history in both earth and Hades if they are the same one place. MacCulloch calls the author of the Gospel a writer of fiction, and says that he concocted his story out of the floating traditional material and the Bible to produce an original narrative, one, he asserts, that must have greatly influenced contemporary and later writers.

In expounding the doctrine of baptism as a part of Christ's preaching and ministration in Hades, it is repeatedly affirmed that he not only baptized on earth, but did also in Hades. It is probably scurrilous to reflect that if he did much baptizing in the three days in Hades, he would have had little time left for preaching, and again vice versa. Also one might wonder where he would procure water for this rite in hell, where Christian ideology insists that the heat is a thousand times hotter than any on earth. Allegory can make folly of its literal counterpart indeed, and fools of its literal interpreters.

Also in the Gospel of Nicodemus a bit of symbolism is introduced that again has gone all unredeemed to intelligence. The light that Jesus' advent shed through all Hades is said to have shone at midnight. In the New Testament allegory of the five wise and the five foolish virgins the cry announcing the bridegroom's appearance arose "at midnight." Even the birth of Christ has been in hymn, carol and legend put at midnight. The sense back of this lurks in the natural poetry that symbolized the period of soul's immersion in the water of bodily life, or its "burial" in the earthy body (the first man is of the earth, earthy, says St. Paul) as its night time or its winter time. These are both times of darkness and therefore emblemize the period of the soul's occlusion under the cover of the flesh. "When half spent was the night" is the poetic dating of the birth of the Christmas rose in old English caroling. It also happens that in the entire round of the soul's cycle of incarnation and resurrection at the cycle's end, the Christ nature comes to its birth in the middle of the lower arc of the round, or at midnight of the evolutionary day-night.

It is most interesting to note the play on the mind of an orthodox scholar like MacCulloch of the persuasions and biases engendered by conventional Christian indoctrination. He several times touches upon aspects of the Pagan esoteric philosophy, which in general furnished the true source and background of the many garbled, literalized and distorted Christian versions and variants of these representations. In the end, with the real lost light and the gold of truth right under his eye, he invariably rejects this stone which could be the head of the theological corner of the temple of religion discarding it as Pagan heresy. He says (p. 276) that the Jews of Alexandria, doubtless influenced by Greek views, believed that souls liberated from the bondage of the earthly body, went directly to a higher sphere which might be named "heaven." Souls at death had no need to go down to Hades, for they had been there all life long, and it was, on the contrary, the place from which they were liberated by the good evolutionary offices of death. They needed not to descend to some lower limbo as an intermediate place of waiting, as it was in body on earth that they had been waiting for release. All common religious sentiment in the world testifies to this conviction as being the natural view our minds must take. And by comparison with this innate and wholesome reaction of souls to the life

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they consciously experienced here it becomes glaringly evident how corrupted, how weird and grotesque were the guessings and maunderings of the Christian misconceptions even down to the modern day.

Finally our author, MacCulloch, comes to grips with the question whether the idea, so prevalent in the early Christian literature, of the rescue of souls from Hades had its origin in the Pagan mythologies. He decides that it is not easy to find close parallels. A difficulty in the way of matching the Christian renditions with the myths, he reasons, is that in the latter it is only one character, as Eurydice, Alcestis, Tammuz or other, who is rescued and restored to the upper world, whereas in the Christly rescue mission all souls bound in the underworld - or at least all righteous ones - are liberated. This is a feeble, in fact a ridiculous, argument because in a myth the modus of writing makes one character representative and typical of a group, class or collective multiplicity. If the orthodox mind was open to the truth of the matter, the fact would be clearly discerned that their own Biblical Son of God is such a typical figure, one man in the allegory, but the type-figure of the sons of God collectively.

Secondly, he asserts that the descent of Pagan heroes is made by a living hero of the myth, and not by the soul of a human person deceased. This point can be dismissed as equally irrelevant and empty. Since when are we to think that a mythical hero

is to be taken as a really living person? The very soul of a myth is its freedom to create both characters and incidents entirely mythical, yet typical of reality. Its hero is understood to be no living person. A living human could not be the hero of a myth, for the simple reason that he would not be mythical. If in the myth Orpheus goes down to rescue Eurydice, the sense intended is the very thing that MacCulloch asserts it fails to mean (and that he claims the Christian versions do mean), namely, that souls do descend to Hades, known, however, to the mythicists to be this world. The Pagan wise men did not take their myths literally; it is the Christians who have fallen into this trap.

MacCulloch contends that contemporary Judaism embodied no legends or doctrines of a Messiah who would preach to the dead, nor does it reveal any evidence of influence from the myth of Ishtar. Can it be possible that this modern writer has never suspected that the Esther and Mordecai characters in the Old Testament are actually Jewish modifications of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar (Astarte, Ashtaroth) and her consort Marduk? And is he oblivious of the fact that Solomon himself built a temple to Astarte, as well as his great edifice to Jehovah? Even without these two glaring rebuttals of his opinions, it is wholly unreasonable to suppose that the religion of any nation in ancient days could have developed in isolation from the influences of the universal Pagan religious modes and the literary media of the time. He several times rebuts the theory of "borrowing." To suggest that it is unlikely that the Jews borrowed Pagan ideas from Egypt, Chaldea, Greece is somewhat on a par with protesting that Californians did not borrow their use of the English language from Pennsylvanians. As California and Pennsylvania alike shared with all the other states a common heritage of English speech, so Jews, Egyptians, Greeks, Babylonians and the other lands in that section of the world shared distributively the great heritage of a primeval revelation of truth and wisdom, which, it must be said in truth, Christianity appropriated and badly mangled. One nation or another in time twisted it out of its primal true sense, distorting it by dull incomprehension into fantastic untruth. And because the resultant deposits in different nations in the end failed to carry much of the original identity, a presumably learned scholar feels he stands on sure ground in concluding that some one religious group, hugging to its bosom its own distorted version, did

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not "borrow" its system from any of its neighbors. Of course it did not borrow it; it merely clung to its own corrupted rendition, as its neighbors did to theirs, with perhaps slight accommodations resulting from association and interchange. But any astute mind, fortified now with the recovered lost keys to a universal esoteric-symbolic code of allegorism, can, with the display of a modicum of semantic or analogical genius, still reconstruct the dismantled bridges between all of the national systems of ancient religion, and reintegrate their original unity and continuity. For the scholarship of many dark centuries to have lost the primary recondite base of the ancient drama, that this earth is that dark gloomy underworld of "Egyptian bondage", and the human body that tome of "Death" into which the Christ-soul of divinity descended to "lose" its life that it might win it back more abundantly, at the same time raising on the cross of matter the serpent power of the natural energies to the next level of consciousness above them, has been in all conscience the most tragic of all errors in the area of man's religious history.

## THE Gnostic POSITION

MacCulloch does say that spontaneously in the order of human thought there arises the certitude of soul's salvation from the doom of existence in a dark underworld. Instinctively, too, the human mind revolts against the inevitability of the conquest of life by a death that means extinction. He follows this admission by declaring that therefore the presence of the doctrine of deliverance from the underworld in Christianity need not be traced back to antecedent alien origins. But why insist on the isolation of either the Jews or the Christians from their natural and inevitable participation in the great universal religious heritage of their times? A sounder scholarship should now come forth, competent to demonstrate how the ideas shared by many nations do trace back to a common ancestry.

The odd excrescence from literalism in Christian doctrinal history known as Chiliasm should find mention here. The name is from the Greek word for "thousand", chilia, and designates the belief of Christians, based on the Biblical text, which says that Christ's kingdom shall supervene on earth for a thousand years of halcyon blessedness. When this age of serenity comes on earth, it is expected that the dead saints will arise from their graves, or emerge from Hades, to exult in final release and exaltation to heaven.

The exigencies arising in the effort to harmonize the literal sense of many texts with canonized doctrinism bring up a point of much logical difficulty in connection with what is stated in Matt. 27:51-53. There it is set forth that the earthquake which occurred at Jesus' death rocked open the tombs of the dead, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose and, emerging from their tombs after his resurrection, entered into the holy city and appeared to many. One must wonder what happened in the opened graves in the three days between Jesus' death and his resurrection. One writer, Pfleiderer, thinks it irreverent to suggest that the reawakened dead should have resurrected two or three days ahead of their Lord. They would from courtesy to their master have had to be held in some suspended status until Easter morn.

How the difficult matter of the physical rehabilitation of those saints so long dead and certainly in a state of corruption was managed is intimated in a text from The Odes of Solomon (22): "Those who believed in Him God's hand

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chose from the graves, separated them from the dead, took dead bones and clad them with bodies." Ephrem Syrus thinks that the graves were shattered by Christ's voice as it reverberated through Sheol (the Hebrew Hades), releasing the dead saints. This definitely puts the saints in hell. In popular creedology, this is an ill fate for sainthood.

Clement and some other writers appear to hold saner ground when they say that the risen dead appear not in earthly Jerusalem (the holy city), but in the heavenly Jerusalem." Jerome, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Epiphanius and Rufinus agree. They stand with St. Paul, who speaks of the "Jerusalem which is above" as being free. St. Ambrose solves complications by saying that of the resurrected dead some were led to heaven in spiritual bodies, while others rose in their physical bodies.

Bartholomew, ventures the suggestion that Jesus vanished from the cross during the darkness, descended to Hades, released the captives and returned to the cross. The apostle says that he saw him return, saw the dead arising to worship him, then returned into their sepulchres. In The Ascension of Isaiah the righteous dead are already found in the seventh heaven.

Giving a passing glance at a tradition that souls had been raised bodily from death, MacCulloch says that this was credited by some theologians, but that many treated it as allegory. Yet he must express the thought that to render these accounts in a mythical way is to register a gross miscomprehension of the real meaning!

And what is to be done with the predicament which so impiously disenchant the glamors of "miracle" belief, implicit in the question whether those who were resurrected to physical life died again later - or still live on. Of what good is a resurrection in physical body if one is to die shortly again?

In his chapter 18, MacCulloch examines the "Gnostic version" of the descent doctrine, as expressed in a "famous" Hymn of the Pearl in the Syriac version of The Acts of Thomas. Some have regarded this as a Gnostic allegory, with "Jesus" as the human soul descending from heaven to this gloomy world, vested there with material and quasi-material bodies (coats of skin) and having through trial and suffering to regain his lost Paradise above. Our author even suggests that this has a certain attractiveness, but argues that if the precious Pearl is the Gnosis, or divine knowledge, why should it have fallen under the power of the serpent? What other answer is needed for this than the plain reminder that God sent his own Son (collectively Sons) out into the desert of this world to tread down the serpents and scorpions of man's lower nature, a task which necessitated the seed implantation of the divine units in and under the life of the body and its elemental forces, the lower nature being typified as the serpent. Why did God permit his most righteous servant, Job, another type-figure of our divine nature, to be tortured by the lower powers? A philosophy is deficient that does not have a rational answer to the basic question, why man is in this dark underworld at all? The esoteric philosophy has answered this and the other fundamental questions, but Christianity has discarded and lost them. MacCulloch decides that the early Christian movement had harbored some reasonable elements of the otherwise insupportable Gnostic theology. Gnosticism, he affirms, carries some taint of Pagan ideology, while on the other side it has some orthodox Christian affinities. But when one speaks of the possibility of Gnosticism borrowing from Christianity, it is somewhat like saying that a father derives some salient characteristics from his son. If borrowing was done here, it would have had to be done by Christ-

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ianity from the earlier Gnosticism.

MacCulloch refutes the contention of Bousset that the legend of Christ's descent to Hades and breaking the hold of the underworld demons on the dead was the essence of a myth which had really nothing to do with the Gospel Christ, or Jesus. He backs this strong assertion by the statement that the Christians had the narrative of the descent in their own Scriptures and did not need to borrow it from outside Pagan sources. But does he ask us to believe that those "Christian Scriptures" themselves owed not a thing to antecedent Pagan springs? This assumption has been refuted - and the present discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls accentuates this truth - by scholarship generally. Bousset doubtless based his assertion on a consideration of this and other obvious data.

MacCulloch concludes that Gnosticism and its view of the descent story stood somewhere between Pagan mythology and Catholic Christianity. But its version lent strong testimony to the prevalence of the Christ-descent in the early Christian world. No one denies this. Only it is clear from wide study that the descent doctrine was more Pagan and Gnostic than Christian, as being much earlier. He then makes the fatal blunder of saying that the Gnostics took the theme from Christianity - a most unlikely thing - and converted it from the descent of Christ from earth to the Hades somewhere below into his descent from heaven to our earth. But this exactly reverses the direction of the actual historical conversion of the legend, for it was the Christians who took the original Gnostic-Pagan form of the story and transformed it into the literal-historical-personal descent of Jesus to some nether world beneath this earth. He asserts that the alleged Gnostic transmogrification of the story shows poverty of conception. The intellectual impecuniousness is, however, all on the Christian side.

Our scholar is bold enough to venture the statement that the Gnostics showed no theological concern about what happened to those living antecedent to the time of Christianity, which brought the first chance at salvation to humanity somewhere around 24 to 26 A.D. (the date of Christ's birth and life now having been moved back by Catholic authority some five years). He thus insinuates that the Gnostics were less humanely responsive to the need to provide a way by which the world inhabitants since the advent of Christ might assuage their pity for the uncounted billions of souls lost in heathen darkness by having lived too soon, than were the Catholics, who, he declares, at least contrived a theological formula which made their ultimate salvation a possibility. But does this author not see that in the infinitely profounder Gnostic postulation of recurrent lives for souls on earth, no souls would have been left in the position of deprivation of endless opportunity to win all that life can offer its children? It was not Gnosticism or Paganism, but Christianity, that robbed the souls of antecedent humanity of their chance at salvation. Pagan philosophy had opened out the road to salvation for all mankind; it was Christianity that threw up on this highway to divinity the roadblock of no divinity to save humanity until 26 A.D.

In his final chapter MacCulloch climaxes his argument that the descent doctrine could trace no derivation from Pagan sources. He discounts heavily what he calls the passion with many writers to trace Christian formulations, doctrines, rites to Pagan myths. He accuses such writers of not being competent to make authentic comparison between Pagan and Christian data. This is to say that these writers "see" resemblances, correspondences, identities where none really exists. The shoe that this accusation fits is again on the other foot; it is the Christian comparative religionists who so consistently fail to see the endless similarities and identities that most assuredly do exist between

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these two bodies of literary expression. If the scholars he is accusing see too much parallelism that is not there, the orthodox Christian party stands blind to the parallelism that is there to be seen by any who will look, - with unprejudiced vision. The similarities are not too easily caught by shallow reading, but their number and their significance increase as study probes deeper and deeper. Such profounder study is now veering to the verdict that Christianity drew practically everything it published to the world from antecedent Pagan sources. The blindness of Christian insight or disingenuousness of motive in ignoring or blanketing this immense testimony of comparative religion - along with comparative mythology - is coming to be seen as one of the most inexcusable, if not fully reprehensible of recalcitrant bigotry that cultural history records.

Then our author leaves us breathless with astonishment commingled with puzzlement when he declares that this class of writers have never seemed to consider that after all those Pagan myths may actually depict living truths. And, he speculates, what if the conceptions dramatized in the myths may have been really fulfilled in factual Christian history. With this one sudden volte face



MacCulloch vindicates the very position of those whose stand he is attempting to refute. What an argument! What a wild flourish of logic! The Pagan myths represented a deific power as coming to save unregenerate humanity; Christianity declares that in Jesus this divine salvation did come, fulfilling all antecedent prophecy. Therefore, argues our debater, Paganism could indulge only in baseless mythology, whereas Christianity supplied, or at least built on, the living reality that became history in the person of Jesus. But does MacCulloch not see that, instead of disparaging, discrediting the myth, the Christian claims for Jesus actually vindicate the inner connotations of the myths? The very message that is sealed cryptically in the myths is just about what the Christians say has been fulfilled in its theses based on the Gospel narrative of the Jesus life. The difference is that the myths never presumed on the fulfillment of their structures of meaning in one given set of historical events such as those which the Gospels allegedly narrate, while Christian systematism builds on that very assumption. The myths outlined and dramatized the pattern and meaning of the historical process; Christianity alleged that the Gospel events fulfilled that pattern once for all time. If it is true, as more scholars are coming to think, that the Gospels are spiritual allegories, Mystery dramas, and in this sense non-historical, it suddenly becomes permissible to say that the Gospels, the foundation of all Christian historicity, are themselves true only as myths, and not true as history. So it comes out that if Pagan mythical formulations may have had their pattern of meaning fulfilled, as MacCulloch ventures to surmise, than all the endless narrow slighting and scurrilous disparagement that Christian writers have cast on Paganism, mythicism, Gnosticism and related systems of the esoteric presentation of truth has been an egregious miscarriage of intelligence and human brotherhood alike.

## THE TRUTH OF MYTHOLOGY

The nub of this whole debate is the failure of modern scholarship to comprehend in full truth the nature and function of the myth. Through stolid inertia of mind and the process of insensible shifts of conception that in time twist the primal sense of words over into some secondary or subordinate aspect of relevance, the modern mind has come to read into this word "myth" the meaning of untruth, something imaginatively conceived, fantastic, bearing no relation

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to reality. By myth a modern writer now means a story that is not true.

This meaning falls so far out of line with the true original connotation that it now stands as the exact opposite of the primal significance. The ancient myth was the truest of all stories. It always carried more truth than history. Modernity worships the barren record of objective history and derogates the myth; the sagacity of the ancient day worshipped the myth and derogated, in fact virtually ignored, the objective history. Being admittedly imaginative and fictional in outward form and content, it made no pretence to factual objectivity. The story, with actors, characters and incidents, never happened as narrated. And nobody was supposed to be so naïve, so stupid as to "believe" it. But into the story the genius of dramatism inwove the design of conceptual structure, the pattern of a truth, the plot of an ideogram, concocting situations that gave the mind a veritable picture of some aspect of truth that history in the large was telling or was destined to unroll. The myth wrapped up in a fiction the meaning, the structure of history that was, is and is to be. It was a brilliantly ingenious methodology of presenting in the frame of a human story the idea-forms which, as Plato shows us, were the grand bases of speculative philosophy in his day, as also in old Egypt, and which he demonstrated to be the thought-forms over the pattern of which the creative Mind of the Logos framed the universe. So the myth, it might be said, was a cosmic ideograph in fictional disguise. Apollo really did not let his son Phaeton drive the chariot of the sun across the sky and scorch the earth; but the conceptual structure dramatized by the story is a truth of vital import. Theseus did not penetrate Minos' labyrinth, slay the great bull and follow Ariadne's thread to find his way out. But, at the level of intellectual insight the story tells the great truth that man's soul must enter an underworld full of devious intricacies, find and slay the fierce and doughty animal nature and by the thin light of a divine intuition make his way back to the light of an upper world. The day in which modern superciliousness bred by the presumption of superior knowledge can belittle and deride the majestic structures of classical mythology is fortunately close to its evening dusk. When we catch enough of the spirit of the ancient mythicists to begin to interpret aright the myths and release the glowing intelligence hidden in those recondite constructions, the world may at last emerge from its "Dark Ages" of religious superstition.

When MacCulloch, therefore, contends, as he persists in doing in face of a mountain of research data establishing the contrary



thesis, that the descent narrative in early Christian literature is to be accounted for without admitting any derivation from prior Pagan mythology, he is both defying evidence and merely venting the force of an inveterate Christian or modernistic prejudice which has steadily dominated Christian scholarship over the centuries and still obsesses Christian psychology. The theme of the hero descending and freeing souls bound in an underworld limbo comes close to being the central and pivotal feature of ancient religious philosophy. The evidence back of this statement is voluminous and clear. But it has to be examined to be known. No doubt it has all seemed to Christian mentality so bizarre, so childishly grotesque, so unrelated to reality as to be dismissed with contempt. But this is because the Christian mind has been conditioned that all Pagan religion, with all its literature that ran so strongly to mythicism, was nothing better than puerile naïveté of mind, the wild conceptions of child-minded primitive peoples. The myths were condemned as fantastic nonsense and this attitude occluded the possibility of discerning their meaning and their importance.

Finally, that the descent tradition, couched in the language and forms of

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mythology, was a structure that carried the meaning of not one single man's descent from the cross of this earth life down into some nameless limbo called Hades, hell, Amenta, Sheol, Tophet, but the descent of hosts of divine soul units, sent out from heaven to be the child-deity that is cradled through infancy, roused or resurrected in his youth to conscious functioning of his divine genius and finally grown to the fulness of the stature of the nature of Christhood within the temple of every mortal's heart and mind, is as clear to capable scholarship as any such abstrusity can be. It happens to be irrefutably, incontrovertibly true.

MacCulloch assumes to conclude his case with the statement that the Christian movement did not pick up the descent tradition from Pagan mythology; they could and presumably did devise their own myths. How devastatingly true that statement is our author could hardly have guessed or believed. The ancients devised their great myths, every feature of which betokened some facet of sublime truth. The Christians, in the form of their weird misinterpretation of these creations, or out of their own misguided conceptual efforts, also devised the "myths" that, parading in the false disguise of truth, have derationalized and enslaved the Western mind. The tragic word that has to be spoken in the summary of this theme is that these concretions of the Christian mind that constitute Christian theology are myths in the bad modern sense, things fantastically untrue. It has to be said that they do not dramatize truth, but wildly caricature it. The true myth has two aspects, literal falsity (that deceives nobody) and inner subjective truth. Paganism kept the two phases entirely distinct; but Christianity confused the two, mistaking the outer falsity for truth. Therefore its presentation of these ancient formulations has been untrue and harmfully deceptive. The affirmation of their literal-historical truth, which at once becomes untruth, practically kills the power of their inward verity. By obsessing the believer's consciousness with such a story, for instance, as that of the bodily crucifixion of one man on a wooden cross, and offering this as the Creator's device for the salvation of his earthly children, the Christian system of pious faith has so enfeebled the message of man's true spiritual regeneration as to have reduced it almost to a moral and intellectual nullity. In persuading the West's millions for centuries that thrice dousing the head with water, along with the recital of the names of the triune deity, will insure the individual's sanctification in perpetuity, the Church of Christ again robs the devotee of the dynamic knowledge that the immersion of the unit of his soul power in the water of the body will give it the experience required to consummate a truly deific beatification. And by the inculcation in generation after generation of the belief that in partaking of the bread and wine in the physical celebration of the Eucharist, the member partakes magically of the actual body and blood of the man of Galilee, the psychological forces that might enrich the spirit are dissipated out in an empty fancy. Without exception every doctrine of this folly-ridden system has thus been distorted from truth and illuminating power into palsyng falsity of alleged history.

Almost every traditional faith of peoples the world over rests on a central story of the son of a heavenly King going down into a dark lower world, there suffering, dying and rising again and returning to its native upper world. The failure of Christian intelligence to see that their basic theology is just a gross stolid literalization, and then the conjured historization of this universal legend in the hypostatized biography of just one of the many dramatic type-figures, who was no more a living man than some thirty to fifty others similarly delineated - and all antecedent to him in time - must be seen ere long in its true light, as the most colossal demonstration of intellectual ineptitude in all history. As has had so often to be said in the treatment of this chapter of religious development, it has held the mind of Western humanity

under the spell of a hallucination that has strewn the path of Occidental history with the sad wreckage of life and happiness. It is by no means an overstretching of the truth to assert that it has hypnotized the Western mentality.

It can almost certainly be said, and with truth, that no religion in the world has ever put forth the belief that the demise of the physical body has ended the existence of the soul that animated that body. Likewise no religion has ever taught or conceived - except in the grossest mental depravity - that the decaying cadaver of the deceased human is reassembled after corruption, reintegrated and restored to former physical existence. Therefore the Christian linking of the resurrection doctrine with the death and restoration of their hero's physical body wrecked the doctrine utterly. The death that was overcome on Easter morn is soul's "death" and that not of one man's soul, but the souls of all men that live, which "he" typified.

And finally, that the traditional allegory of the Christ-soul's descent from heaven into a dark nether region to awaken the hosts of the earth's former dead could ever have been sanely made relevant to any other locality than our good earth itself, is again the incredible miscarriage of Western intelligence.

When this benighted condition can be ended by the dawn of understanding, when it is known in what we call the scientific manner that every intimation of the allegories has immediate pertinence to our own life in this dark underworld, and that the Scriptures are all sheer poetic dramatization of the deep ignorance we yet struggle through toward the day of our glorious transfiguration into sons of God, then will our sacred Scriptures become once again shining lamps lighting our path up the heights of wondrous being.

Then can the truth and the beauty of the resurrection ritual enlighten our reason and truly sanctify our spiritual minds as we hear the thrilling strains of the Easter choral. **END**